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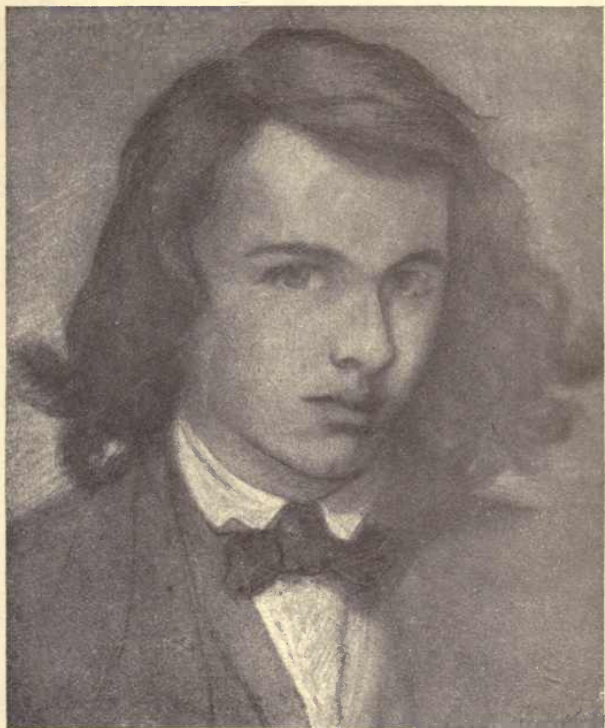
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DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

DANTE GABRIEL  
ROSSETTI  
PAINTER & MAN OF LETTERS

BY  
FRANK RUTTER



WITH TWENTY-FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS

LONDON  
GRANT RICHARDS

1908

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## PREFACE

So many books, from pens so eminent, have already appeared on the life and work of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, that the hazardous experiment of adding to their number could hardly have been made without the direct encouragement of a publisher perhaps too kind. The present monograph cannot claim to contain any new facts or discoveries, the aim of the writer having been to tell the story of Rossetti's life as far as possible in Rossetti's own words and in the words of the most unimpeachable eye-witnesses of his career and progress; while in criticism it has been his constant endeavour to steer a judicial middle course between the Scylla of infatuation and the Charybdis of irrelevant censure. The reader, then, will readily perceive that there is little in the following pages which cannot be found, with more or less trouble, in the multitudinous Rossetti literature already existing.

To Mr. W. M. Rossetti, the standard authority on the subject, grateful acknowledgment is here made for permission to quote at some length both from his brother's Family Letters and his own invaluable Memoir. In addition to the 'Family Letters with a Memoir,' Mr. W. M. Rossetti's 'Pre-Raphaelite Diaries and Letters,' 'Rossetti Papers,' 'Ruskin, Rossetti, and Pre-Raphaelitism,' 'Some Reminiscences,' and 'D. G. Rossetti as Designer and Writer' should be named as authorities to be consulted. Many graphic details and incidents in Rossetti's life are also to be found in Mr. F. M. Hueffer's 'Ford Madox Brown,' in Mr. J. W. Mackail's 'Life of William Morris,' in Lady Burne-Jones's 'Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones,' in Mr. W. Holman Hunt's 'Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood,' and Mr. William Bell Scott's 'Autobiographical Notes.'

For illuminating criticism of the highest order the reader may be referred to the papers in Mr. A. C. Swinburne's 'Essays and Studies,' Walter Pater's 'Introduction' to Rossetti's poems (1883), the late

## PREFACE

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Dr. Garnett's article on 'D. G. Rossetti' in the 'Dictionary of National Biography,' the section on Rossetti in Mr. D. S. MacCqll's 'Nineteenth Century Art,' and Mr. Theodore Watts-Dunton's incomparable essay 'The Truth about Rossetti,' which appeared in the 'Nineteenth Century' for March, 1883, and still awaits republication. Mention should also be made of Mr. F. G. Stephens's 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti,' and the more recent volume on 'Rossetti' (1904), by Mr. Arthur G. Benson. The foregoing is far from exhausting the bibliography of Rossetti, but it includes the majority of the works consulted by the present writer, and specifies those which, in his opinion, are most helpful to a right understanding of Rossetti's life and art.

F. R.

1908



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# I

## EARLY YEARS

DISCONNECTED as they appear, far as they seem apart, the Battle of Waterloo and the pre-Raphaelite brotherhood are to each other distinctly related. Among the many far-reaching results of Wellington's victory was the restoration to the throne of Naples of the Bourbon King Ferdinand I, and if this change of government had no great lasting effect on the politics of Italy, it profoundly influenced the life and fortunes of one Italian, Gabriel Rossetti, father of our painter-poet.

Though of exceedingly humble parentage, the youngest son of a blacksmith in the south of Italy, this Gabriel Rossetti was a man of considerable culture and intellect. He showed the germs of his son's versatility in art and letters, having a natural talent for drawing as well as writing. It was the last, however, that he cultivated professionally, and early in life he made a local reputation as a poet. Settling at Naples,

## 2 DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

he became in turn librettist to the operatic theatre of San Carlo, curator of the museum in that city, and finally, having gained the friendship of Murat, a secretary in the Department of Public Instruction. It was this position that he held in 1815, being then thirty-two years of age, when his country was convulsed by the downfall of Napoleon. The Neapolitans did not take kindly to the new regime, and Gabriel Rossetti enrolled himself among the revolutionaries. After five years of strife and tumult Ferdinand suppressed constitutional government with Austrian bayonets, Rossetti was proscribed, and in 1821, disguised in a British uniform, he fled to Malta on board a man-of-war. Three years later he arrived in England, and at forty-one began his life anew as a teacher of Italian. In London he made the acquaintance of an Italian family, by name Polidori, living at 15 Park Village, East, Regent's Park.

Gaetano Polidori, son of a physician at Bientina in Italy and a former secretary to Alfieri, had come to England in 1789 and married an English governess, Miss Pierce. Drawn together by their common nationality, position, and tastes, both exiles, who had held positions of importance and were now reduced to earn a scanty livelihood by teaching their native language to foreigners, Rossetti speedily became intimate with

Polidori and the other members of his household, with his children Henry and Charlotte—of whom we shall hear more as ‘Uncle Henry’ and ‘Aunt Charlotte’—but especially with his daughter, Frances Mary Lavinia. They became engaged, and in 1826, two years after his arrival in England, Gabriel Rossetti married Miss Polidori, by whom he had four children.

Of this remarkable family the eldest was Maria Francesca, born in 1827, who, inheriting her mother’s deeply religious nature, eventually entered an Anglican sisterhood. She died in 1876, and was the only one of the four to escape celebrity, though she too had her share of the family literary talent, and published in 1846 a little religious allegory entitled ‘The Rivulets,’ also known as the ‘Vision of Human Life.’

The second child, born at 38 Charlotte Street, Portland Place, on May 12, 1828, was Gabriel Charles Dante, later to become famous as DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI. The third was William Michael, born in 1829, still happily alive, and widely known as the assiduous biographer of his brother; while the youngest, born in 1830, was Christina, the gifted poetess.

Although Rossetti dropped his second name early

#### 4 DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

in life, it is interesting to recall that he received this from his godfather and father's friend, Mr. Charles Lyell of Kinnordy, a student of Italian literature and father of the celebrated geologist, Sir Charles Lyell. The transposition of his other two, 'Gabriel Dante' into 'Dante Gabriel,' was made about the close of 1848; at all events, in September of that year we find him signing himself, as customary hitherto, 'G. C. Rossetti' in a letter to his mother, while the next month (November) he signs a letter to his brother 'Gabriel Dante Rossetti,' which he changes the following year (1849) to 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti,' and this henceforward is his usual signature. It has been suggested that this change was made to remove possible confusions between father and son, but, plausible though it sounds, the explanation is far from convincing. Rossetti was never called 'Dante'; to his friends and relatives he was always 'Gabriel,' and changes of name to avoid confusion in a family are generally begun at home. In no letter previous to September, 1848, does Dante appear in his signature, whereas Charles does almost invariably. Then suddenly it disappears altogether, and Dante is given the first place. In the absence of any official explanation, it seems more likely that the change was made purely to please the owner. At that time he was just

emerging from the student stage to take up his professional career as a painter; renewed study of his father's favourite poet—whom he 'rediscovered' for himself<sup>1</sup>—had taught him to appreciate more keenly the dignity of the name he bore. Is it improbable to suppose that the rearrangement of names is his acknowledgment of the fact? A passage from the preface to 'Early Italian Poets' seems to bear out this hypothesis. 'In those early days,' he says, 'all around me partook of the influence of the great Florentine; till, from viewing it as a natural element, I also, growing older, was drawn within the circle.' Of what is Rossetti speaking here if not of the

<sup>1</sup> 'No doubt our father's Dantesque studies saturated the household air with wafts and rumours of the mighty Alighieri; therefore the child breathed Dante (so to speak), but he did not think Dante, nor lay him to heart. On the contrary, our father's speculations and talk about Dante—which, although he highly valued the poetry as such, all took an abstruse or theoretic turn—rather alienated my brother than otherwise, and withheld him from "looking up" the Florentine, to see whether his poems were things readable, like those of Shakespeare, Scott, or Goethe. With all of us children the case was the same. I question whether my brother had ever read twenty consecutive lines of Dante until he was some fifteen or sixteen years of age; no doubt after that he rapidly made up for lost time.'—W. M. ROSSETTI. 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters, with a Memoir.'

## 6 DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

transition from unquestioning acceptance to conscious enthusiasm? And is not this the moment when he would remember that he too had the right to bear this glorious name, and forthwith make of it his oriflamme?

Of Rossetti's school life there is little to tell. His father since 1831 had been professor of Italian at King's College, London, and thereby entitled to send one son to the day school there free of charge, and a second at reduced fees. To King's College School, then, after a year at a preparatory school near Portland Place, went the two young Rossettis in the autumn of 1837. Dante Gabriel is said to have shown some aptitude for languages, especially French and Latin, but a profound dislike for scientific and mathematical studies. It is curious that his drawing master there was no less a person than John Sell Cotman, who does not appear, however, to have discerned any remarkable promise in his pupil. That Rossetti made no special friends here may be traced to his sensitiveness and natural reserve, rather than to any real lack of sociability. On his own confession he 'shrank' from the amusements of his schoolfellows—for sport and games he never showed the slightest interest—and we may imagine him a bookish boy, reticent except to his home-circle, preoccupied even then with his own dreams, already a poet and illustrator in his childish

way, and with his heart set on these things instead of cricket and football.

Far more congenial to him was his home-life, of which he has left several vivid little word-pictures scattered among his writings. The loneliness and straitened circumstances of the family only served to draw its members closer together, and if the Rossettis at that time had few English acquaintances, no Italian seemed to have passed through London without coming to see them. Mazzini and Pagannini were among those who came to Charlotte Street, but the old patriot welcomed his countrymen whatever their rank in life, and organ-grinders and hawkers of plaster images met with no less kind or courteous a reception. Of the evenings when there were no visitors, Rossetti bequeathes us a delightful reminiscence in his story, 'Saint Agnes of Intercession.'

'Among my earliest recollections,' he writes, 'none is stronger than that of my father standing before the fire when he came home in the London winter evenings, and singing to us in his sweet, generous tones: sometimes ancient English ditties—such songs as one might translate from the birds, and the brooks might set to music; sometimes those with which foreign travel had familiarised his youth—among them

the great tunes which have rung the world's changes since '89. I used to sit on the hearthrug listening to him, and look between his knees into the fire till it burned my face, while the sights swarming up in it seemed changed and changed with the music, till the music and the fire and my heart burned together, and I would take paper and pencil and try in some childish way to fix the shapes that rose within me. For my hope, even then, was to be a painter.'

The hope was not belied. Indeed, there never seems to have been any question from the first as to his profession, though his childish drawings held forth no prodigious promise. So in 1842, when he had just turned fourteen, Dante Gabriel was duly entered as an art student at the academy of Mr. S. F. Cary—a son of the translator of 'Dante'—in Bloomsbury Street. Already he had been amusing himself by drawing illustrations for Shakespeare's plays, and for Scott's poems and romances, and in the February of this year he sent his Aunt Charlotte a dozen drawings to sell at a bazaar in which the Countess of Wicklow, to whose family she was governess, was interested. The drawings, about half of which were originals, being duly received and admired, in the following June, Gabriel, like a dutiful nephew, sends his aunt a drawing illustrating Scott's 'Cavalier,' and in a post-



THE BELOVED



script begs her to note that 'the figure is *entirely original*,' underlined. As confirming the child's pater-nity of the man, it is interesting to note this early tendency to create instead of copying, this preference to illustrate some scene or character from literature before the rendering of nature and things seen.

During his four years' attendance at Mr. Cary's academy, Gabriel, it is to be feared, was by no means a diligent student. His attendance was irregular, and his obedience to instruction left something to be desired. There is a story that on being asked by his master why he had absented himself one day, Rossetti on the morrow replied with candour but some bluntness, 'I had a fit of idleness,' and as the fruits thereof distributed among his comrades a bundle of verses. At the same time we find him talking and writing of nothing but books and pictures, and already, foreshadowing the collector, investing every penny he can get in prints and illustrated books. To his brother visiting his uncle Philip Polidori 'the lawyer,' at Chalfont-St.-Giles, he writes excitedly, 'If you want to get splendid prints dirt-cheap, now's your time. Reynolds told me that he would have (to-morrow most probably) a set of Finden's engravings (either the *Tableaux* or the series of *Groups from Different Nations*; I believe the latter) for rather more than *three*

*shillings!* I intended to have bought them myself, only I found after I had bought the *Shakespear* that my pockets were a vacuum.'

Pockets were rarely heavy at 50 Charlotte Street—whither the Rossettis had moved in 1836—and already resources were further straitened by the failing health of the head of the household. In the following year the elder Rossetti had a severe attack of bronchitis, which necessitated a visit to Hastings. But whatever the cares of the father and mother may have been—and they must have been great—there was no dismalness allowed in the house, and the note of gaiety and high spirits, so characteristic of the Pre-Raphaelite Brother, is sounded continually in his boyish correspondence. Take the opening of this letter to his mother at Hastings:—

‘My Dear Mamma,

“Better late than never,” as the cat said to the kitten when the latter relinquished the Wellington boot in despair. And now, having sent preliminaries to pot in one pithy and well-concocted sentence, I shall proceed forthwith to news. . . .’

To the biographers, who remind us too insistently of Rossetti's three Italian grandparents and his southern,

un-English temperament, this extract may be commended. It has the ring of healthy British boyishness, and nothing foreign, except perhaps a budding gift of literary expression and careful phrasing.

This same year is generally supposed to have been one of great importance to Rossetti, for in July, 1843, the competitive cartoons for the decoration of the Houses of Parliament were exhibited at Westminster Hall. 'Here,' says Mr. Benson, 'he first saw the work of Ford Madox Brown, and recognised a new spirit at work, a spirit of originality and fidelity, of revolt against stereotyped conditions.' Alas! Rossetti should have done all this, no doubt, but there is not a shred of evidence to support the statement.

There is not a word of Ford Madox Brown in the long, one might almost say, exhaustive letter which Gabriel wrote to his mother after seeing the exhibition. This is what he says :—

'My Dear Mamma,

'On Monday last (the first day of opening) I visited the exhibition at Westminster Hall of the cartoons for decorating the new Houses of Parliament. When I say cartoons, I mean, of course, the large drawings executed in chalks which are afterwards to be painted in frescoes on the walls. It is

indeed a splendid sight ; by far the most interesting exhibition at which I have ever been. . . . The figures are, almost without exception, as large as life, and in many cases considerably larger. . . .

‘I will now mention a few of those which particularly elicited my admiration. The three which are perhaps generally thought the most of are : *The Landing of Julius Cæsar in Britain and his Opposition by the Natives*, by Armitage ; *Caractacus led Captive through the Streets of Rome*, by Watts ; and *Boadicea addressing her Army before her last Battle with the Romans*, by Selous. Among these, that which I like the best, and indeed more than any other in the exhibition, is the *Caractacus*, the artist of which, a young man by name Watts, has been, ever since he took to the arts, struggling with the greatest poverty. He is, however, as good as he is talented, and has been for many years, in spite of his miserable circumstances, the sole support of his mother. Good fortune has, however, found him out at last in the shape of a £300 prize, which will be followed by much greater remuneration as soon as his picture (of which, as I said before, the cartoon is but a rough sketch) shall have been painted. All this I learnt from one of the models who sat to him, and with whom he agreed that, if his cartoon gained a prize, he (Watts) would pay the model three times the usual sum, but that, if

it was rejected, he should not be considered in any way his debtor, since it was utterly impossible that he should pay, owing to the wretched state of his finances. . . .

‘Taken on the whole, this exhibition may be taken as a proof that High Art and high talent are not confined to the Continent. The common accusation brought against British painters cannot be brought forward here with any show of reason. The accusation to which I allude is that the English clothe their figures too much ; that they conceal their ignorance of anatomy by working up satin and jewels and cloth of gold to the highest state of finish ; and thus, by forcing the spectator, as it were, to admire these outside ornaments, cause him to overlook the want of correct drawing. Here, however, such artifices are utterly out of the question. In the first place, the absence of colour renders it impossible that such stratagems should be resorted to ; and in the second place, the subjects (principally taken from Milton and the early English history) made the naked figure positively necessary, and thus cut off effectually any such means of escape. There is also another very gratifying feature in this exhibition. Almost all the successful competitors are young men who now appear for the first time before the public, thus directly giving the lie to the vile snarling assertion that British Art is

slowly but surely falling, never more to rise. After the first fortnight (during which the price of admission is one shilling) the exhibition will be open gratuitously—a step which, it is feared, will prove somewhat rash on the part of the Committee, as they have not an Italian public to deal with, but an English one.’

This letter clearly proves that to Rossetti the great man of this exhibition was Watts, and not Madox Brown or any other. At the second of these exhibitions, in 1844, he saw Brown’s *Body of Harold brought before William of Normandy*, and *Adam and Eve after the Fall*, but his intense admiration of Brown came later, and any attempt to antedate it is misleading. At this time Rossetti had other things to think about than ‘new spirits,’ and ‘revolts against stereotyped traditions.’ He was still in his early student days, learning the rudiments of his art, and however wayward and stubborn he may have been he had no exaggerated notions of his own achievements, but was keenly conscious of his shortcomings. His parents, to whom even the moderate fees of Mr. Cary’s academy were a serious consideration, naturally desired that he should pass speedily into the Academy schools, and an account of his progress, written in August, 1843, shows that Gabriel himself thoroughly

understood the desirability of qualifying himself for their free tuition.

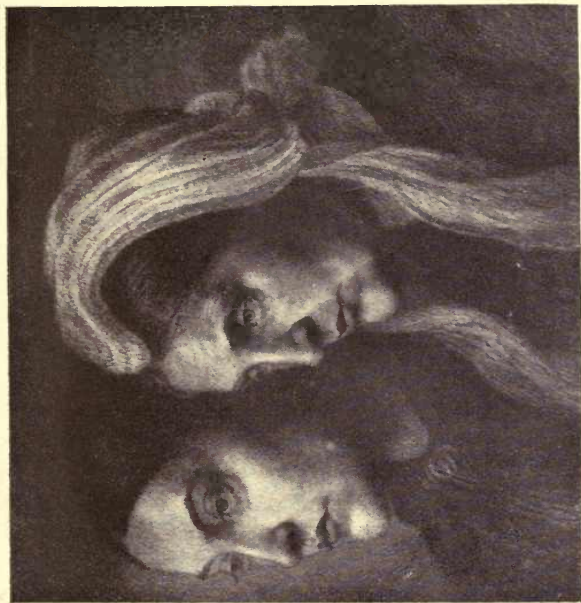
‘I am now engaged,’ he says, ‘on a finished drawing of the *Antinous*, which, supposing it to prove good enough, I may perhaps send in to the Academy. The next opportunity for so doing will be at Christmas, when I may probably try, though certainly not unless I feel sure of success, for a rejection is a thing I should by no means relish. Besides this there are other matters to be attended to ; for, even granted that in the first instance I am admitted, still this is not all. Every successful candidate is required to execute a second drawing, in order to prove that the merit of the first is entirely his own. Added to which he must make drawings of the anatomy figure and of the skeleton, in any of which, if he fail, he ceases to be a student, and very few have the courage to venture on a second trial after the disgrace of a rejection. Having considered these things I shall certainly decline making the attempt at Christmas, unless by that time I shall be fully competent to the ordeal ; my knowledge of anatomy, in spite of my efforts at improvement, being at present less than imperfect. I intend to commence drawing at home from those casts which I possess, and thus endeavour to get into the habit of working without assistance of any kind.

## 16 DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

For this purpose I shall want an easel, since I have lately been so accustomed to use one that I find it impossible now to draw otherwise. It is a thing that I must have sooner or later, and it is not so expensive as I supposed, since I find that a very decent one can be got for five shillings.'

Notwithstanding these 'efforts at improvement,' it was not till three years afterwards, in 1846, that Rossetti at last entered the antique school of the Royal Academy. During these three years the most eventful incidents were two visits to his father's friend Signor Maenza, a watercolour artist at Boulogne, where we find Rossetti again print-collecting and waxing enthusiastic over Gavarni in particular. His reading continued to be principally romantic novels, poems, and dramas; Byron, Bulwer, and Scott are continually mentioned in his letters, and he shows a precocious appreciation of Prosper Mérimée's 'Colomba.' 'It may be feared,' says his brother, 'there was *no* solid reading—whether history, biography, or anything else—irrespective of the few and fragmentary things that he had to get up as a part of the school course. His intellectual life was nurtured upon fancy and sympathy, not upon knowledge or information.'

Like the children of many a less illustrious house-



CHRISTINA ROSSETTI AND HER MOTHER



hold, the young Rossettis collaborated on more than one short-lived magazine for home consumption, but the contributions cannot truthfully be said to have foreshadowed what was to come. As his grandfather Polidori possessed a private printing-press, one of Dante Gabriel's early efforts was printed ‘for private circulation’ in 1843. Entitled ‘Sir Hugh the Heron,’ it is a palpable imitation of Scott, and the author, who never appears to have thought much of it, rightly held it in execration in later years. His literary talent matured suddenly about a year after he entered the Academy schools, where he first met the two friends who were to play so great a part in his life, John Everett Millais and William Holman Hunt. The second of these has given a minute word-portrait of Rossetti's appearance at this time, which may here be quoted: ‘A young man of decidedly foreign aspect, about 5 feet  $7\frac{1}{4}$  in height, with long brown hair touching his shoulders, not taking care to walk erect, but rolling carelessly as he slouched along, pouting with parted lips, staring with dreaming eyes—the pupils not reaching the bottom lids—grey eyes, not looking directly at any point, but gazing listlessly about; the openings large and oval, the lower orbits dark-coloured. His nose was aquiline but delicate, with a depression from the frontal sinus shading the

bridge ; the nostrils full, the brow rounded and prominent, and the line of the jaw angular and marked, while still uncovered with beard. His shoulders were not square, but yet fairly masculine in shape. The singularity of gait depended upon the width of hip, which was unusual. Altogether he was a lightly built man, with delicate hands and feet ; although neither weak nor fragile in constitution, he was nevertheless altogether unaffected by any athletic exercises. He was careless in his dress, which then was, as usual with professional men, black and of evening cut. So superior was he to the ordinary vanities of young men that he would allow the spots of mud to remain dry on his legs for several days. His overcoat was brown, and not put on with ordinary attention ; and, with his pushing stride and loud voice, a special scrutiny would have been needed to discern the reserved tenderness that dwelt in the breast of the apparently careless and defiant youth. But any one who approached and addressed him was struck with sudden surprise to find all his critical impressions dissipated in a moment ; for the language of the painter was refined and polished, and he proved to be courteous, gentle and winsome, generous in compliment, rich in interest in the pursuit of others, and in every respect, so far as could be shown by manner, a cultivated gentleman.'

## PRE-RAPHAELITE PORTRAITURE 19

This characteristic piece of pre-Raphaelite portraiture, while confirming the dreamy, imaginative nature of Rossetti, is noteworthy as a self-revelation of Holman Hunt's habits of observation. That love of detail, which has not unjustly been considered a salient characteristic of the early pre-Raphaelite paintings, here finds full expression. And how insensible to the self-defeat of exaggerated precision and definition must be the writer who fails to see the humour of describing any one as '*about* 5 feet 7 $\frac{1}{4}$  in height.'

## II

# THE PRE-RAPHAELITE BROTHERHOOD

WHEN we recall the bright enthusiasm and generous comradeship of these three students, it is sad to reflect how few were the years of combined effort, how speedily the Brotherhood disintegrated. Millais, Holman Hunt, and Rossetti each went his own way, which was not the way of the other, and as they each became more successful it must reluctantly be admitted that they also became less brotherly. Though their styles grew further and further apart, Hunt and Millais, it is true, remained friends till the end of the latter's life ; but a distinct coolness arose between them and Rossetti, and to the impartial observer it seems that neither side was altogether free from jealousy of the other. Inasmuch as Rossetti had the advantage of being in close touch with a literary and journalistic set who kept his name prominently before the public, the tendency of most writers has been to regard Rossetti as the mainspring of the movement.

In his autobiography, however, Mr. Holman Hunt tells a different story, and the weight of evidence is on his side.

To begin with, Hunt and Millais were intimate for some time before Rossetti was admitted to their friendship. Though two years younger than Hunt, Millais was his senior as an art student. Everybody knows what a prodigy of painting was Millais, how his parents encouraged him in his art, how he made a triumphant entry into the Academy schools when he was only ten years old. Four years later Holman Hunt, having overcome the objection of his father—who as a practical City man looked askance at the precarious profession of an artist—was given a ticket admitting him to the lectures and prize-giving at the Academy. At that prize-giving, in 1843, he first saw his future comrade, to whom he at once was attracted. ‘When it came to the turn of the Antique School,’ Mr. Hunt tells us, ‘attention was breathless as the preliminary words were uttered slowly, and the name of John Everett Millais was given as the winner of the first prize. A moment’s pause, and out of the press a slim lad with curly hair and white collar arose eagerly, and was handed from seat to seat till he descended into the arena, where, remembering his manners, he bowed and approached the desk. As

he returned the applause was boisterous, occasioning some reluctance to advance in the less favoured competitor.'

About a year later, while Hunt was drawing at the British Museum, Millais came up and spoke to him. Soon afterwards Hunt was himself admitted to the Academy schools, and the acquaintance between the two boys ripened into an intimate friendship. They criticised one another's works, the works of their contemporaries, and the work of the old masters, as all art students do, and, being both possessed of keenly analytical intellects, they saw the defects in the artistic canons laid down by the Caracci, and handed down by succeeding academies of painting. They felt that these rules were irksome to a sincere and original painter—that they led to empty pretentiousness and moribund painting. Recording his early conversations with Millais, Mr. Hunt says: 'Often when standing before them we had talked over Raphael's cartoons; now we again reviewed our judgment of these noble designs. We did so fearlessly, but even when most daring we never forgot their claim to be honoured; we did not bow down to the chorus of the blind, for when we advanced to our judgment of *The Transfiguration*, we condemned it for its grandiose disregard of the simplicity of truth, the pompous posturing of the

Apostles, and the unspiritual attitudinising of the Saviour. Treating of the strained and meaningless action of the epileptic, I quoted the arguments of Sir Charles Bell, saying, "You must read them for yourself." In our final estimation this picture was a signal step in the decadence of Italian art. When we advanced this opinion to other students, they, as a *reductio ad absurdum*, had said, "Then you are pre-Raphaelite." Referring to this as we worked side by side, Millais and I laughingly agreed that the designation must be accepted.'

There seems little room for doubt that this chance word, spoken in jest, supplied the two students with a name for the theories they had formed.

Although Rossetti had greatly admired Hunt's picture—from Scott's 'Woodstock'—in the Academy of 1847, it was not till the following year that they became intimate. Till then, Mr. Hunt says: 'I had only been on nodding terms with him in the school. He had always a following of noisy students there, and these had kept me from approaching him with more than a nod, except when once I found him perched on some steps drawing Ghiberti, whom I also studied; that nobody else did so had given us subject for five minutes' talk.' The 'drawing Ghiberti' refers to the cast of the fifteenth-century Florentine's bronze doors, and the two young students' early admiration of

J

N. Holman  
Hunt

this points to their common interest in mediæval work.

To the Academy of 1848 pictures were sent by both Hunt and Millais. The latter's *Cymon and Iphigenia* was rejected, but Hunt's *The Eve of St. Agnes* was hung, and on varnishing day Rossetti 'came up boisterously and, in loud tongue, made me [Hunt] feel very confused by declaring that mine was the best picture of the year.' The fact that the subject of the picture was taken from Keats—a poet little known at that time, but a common object of adoration to both Hunt and Rossetti—heightened the latter's enthusiasm, and Rossetti asked to be permitted to call on the painter. It must be remembered that Rossetti was not only a year the junior of Hunt, but on a much lower level at that time as an art student. Though he sorely chafed against the slowness of his progress, as will subsequently be seen, Rossetti was still in the Antique School, and by academic red tape kept drawing from casts instead of from life as he desired.

Hunt willingly gave permission to Rossetti to call, introduced his new friend to Millais, and the three boys speedily became intimate. Millais was not only the youngest of the three, but by far the better off. His parents, who were in easy circumstances, lived at

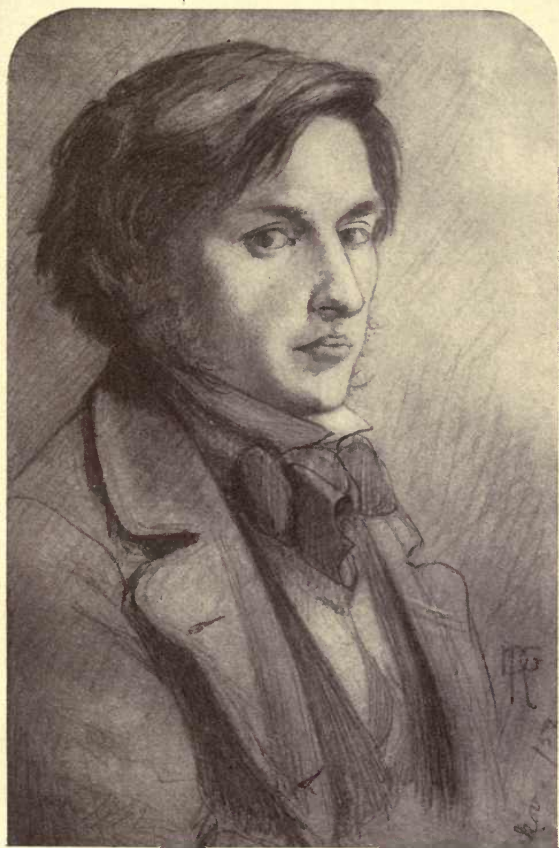
7 Gower Street, and John Everett had already turned a large shed at the back of the house into his studio. Here the three used to forgather to discuss art, and the legend goes that here one August evening in 1848, while looking over a book of engravings by Lasinio of the frescoes in the Campo Santo at Pisa, they decided to found a brotherhood of art.

Before this, however, Rossetti had made another friend of importance. In February, 1848, writing to his aunt Charlotte, he says : ‘ Every time I attempt to express my ideas in colour I find myself baffled, not by want of ability—I feel this, and why should I not say it?—but by ignorance of certain apparently insignificant technicalities which, with the guidance of an experienced artist, might soon be acquired. Such an artist it is not very easy to find out of the ranks of those whose fame either makes them careless of obtaining pupils, or renders their charges for instruction exorbitant. I have got, however, two men in my eye who, possessing abilities equal to the most celebrated, have by some unaccountable accident not obtained, except among their brother artists, that renown which they merited. These therefore would, I should think, be the persons to apply to.’

The identity of one of the ‘two’ is uncertain. Mr. W. M. Rossetti hints at C. H. Lear or

W. D. Kennedy, but it might just as well, and more probably, have been Watts. But the other, to whom Rossetti did apply, was Ford Madox Brown. Brown had not been trained in the Academy schools, but at Antwerp, and afterwards in Paris. 'It was in Paris,' said Brown, 'I first formed my idea of making my pictures real, because no French painter did so.' But it is probable that, while in Belgium, acquaintance with the works of the Flemish Primitives contributed to destroy his faith in the Rubens traditions of his Antwerp master. Brown was by no means accustomed to admiration, and his worst suspicions were aroused when one morning in March, 1848, a month before his twenty-seventh birthday, he received the following letter :—

'Sir,—I am a student in the Antique School of the Royal Academy. Since the first time I ever went to an exhibition (which was several years ago, and when I saw a picture of yours from Byron's "Giaour") I have always listened with avidity if your name happened to be mentioned, and rushed first of all to your number in the catalogue. The *Parisina*, the *Study in the Manner of the Early Masters*, *Our Lady of Saturday Night*, and the other glorious works you have exhibited, have successively raised my admiration, and keep me standing on the same spot for fabulous



FORD MADOX BROWN



lengths of time. The outline from your *Abstract Representations of Justice*, which appeared in one of the Illustrated Papers, constitutes, together with an engraving after that great painter Von Holst, the sole pictorial adornment of my room. And as for the *Mary Queen of Scots*, if ever I do anything in the art, it will certainly be attributable in a great degree to the constant study of that work.

‘It is not therefore to be wondered at if, wishing to obtain some knowledge of colour (which I have as yet scarcely attempted), the hope suggests itself that you may possibly admit pupils to profit by your invaluable assistance. If, such being the case, you would do me the honour to inform me what your terms would be for six months’ instruction, I feel convinced that I should then have some chance in the art.

‘I remain, Sir, very truly yours,

‘GABRIEL C. ROSSETTI.’

Brown thought this letter demanded personal investigation, and armed with a thick stick he went round to 50 Charlotte Street and knocked at the door. He would neither come in nor give his name, but demanded to see Rossetti. When the latter came down he thrust his letter at him with ‘Is your name Rossetti and is this your writing?’ Rossetti,

embarrassed, pleaded guilty on both indictments. Then said Brown with ominous distinctness, 'What do you mean by it?' Rossetti volubly exclaimed that he meant what he said, till Brown, assured that the request was genuine and no pleasantry intended, invited Rossetti to come and see him. The sequel is related by Rossetti in a letter to his aunt. 'He (Brown) requested that I would go down to his studio (which is in Clipstone Street) and see a work he is engaged upon. I accordingly went, and he entered on the subject of my becoming his pupil. He says that he is not in the habit of giving instruction in a professional way; but that any assistance he can afford me he shall be exceedingly happy to impart as a friend, and that even if I wish to go through a regular course of study under his direction—so long as he perceives that I have sufficient talent to make success probable—he most kindly consents to receive me, still as a friend. At the same time he advises me to join an evening academy held in Madox Street, where students can draw from the living model at, I believe, a trifling expense. I shall of course follow his advice. . . . On Monday next I shall join the academy in question.'

At first all went well. Brown set his pupil to copy one of his pictures, and Rossetti in June writes to his aunt: 'I continue going to the Life-school in Madox

Street, where I enjoy my studies much. During the day I paint at Mr. Brown's, who is an invaluable acquisition to me as regards the art, and moreover a most delightful friend. We are already quite confidential. His kindness, and the trouble he takes about me, are really astonishing; I cannot imagine what I have done to deserve them. Yesterday I showed him some of my poetical productions, which he seemed to like much.' But after this, when Brown set him to paint still-life, bottles and pickle-jars, Rossetti's romantic soul rebelled. How differently are painters constituted, and how hard is it for one creative genius to comprehend another of a different mould. The objects of Rossetti's aversion filled Chardin with delight the whole course of his life.

Rossetti was so depressed by this course of object-painting that he seriously thought of abandoning art for literature. Within the last two years his poetical genius had fully matured. He had long outgrown Scott's poetry, and found himself at home in the loftier flights of Keats, Shelley, and Browning. He had made the greater part of those translations now famous as 'Early Italian Poets,' he had written 'The Blessed Damozel,' the beginning of 'Dante at Verona,' and his first version of 'Jenny.' He determined to take professional advice on his chances in literature,

and accordingly, in his characteristic, impulsive way of addressing persons with whom he was not acquainted, he made a selection of his poems and sent them with a letter to Leigh Hunt, from whom he got a most kind and sympathetic reply.

‘I felt perplexed, it is true, at first,’ wrote the veteran, ‘by the translations, which, though containing evidences of a strong feeling of the truth and simplicity of the originals, appeared to me harsh and want correctness in the versification. I guess, indeed, that you are altogether not so musical as pictorial. But when I came to the originals of your own I recognised an unquestionable poet, thoughtful, imaginative, and with rare powers of expression. I hailed you as such at once, without any misgiving; and beside your Dantesque heavens (without any hell to spoil them), admired the complete and genial round of your sympathies with humanity. I know not what sort of painter you are. If you paint as well as you write, you may be a rich man; or, at all events, if you do not care to be rich, may get leisure enough to cultivate your writing. But I need hardly tell you that poetry, even the very best—nay, the best, in this respect, is apt to be the worst—is not a thing for a man to live upon while he is in the flesh, however immortal it may render him in spirit.’

Encouraging though this letter was, it did not justify Rossetti in looking to poetry for sustenance, and when he called on Holman Hunt after their meeting at the Academy, he poured forth all his troubles and difficulties, and asked if it was really necessary to continue painting still-life. Hunt gave him very sensible advice. Without condemning Brown's methods of tuition, he suggested that Rossetti should choose some subject for a picture and begin on the canvas with the still-life accessories of his composition. Rossetti once said to his brother, 'As soon as a thing is imposed on me as an obligation, my aptitude for doing it is gone ; what I ought to do is what I can't do.' This convenient and self-respecting plaint has been uttered as an excuse for shirking by many a lad or grown man without a tithe of Rossetti's genius, but the mental attitude it reveals is generally a serious bar to the full development of talent, and a certain flatness or want of solidity, of which many of his paintings have—not without justice—been accused, is due to Rossetti's impatience in submitting himself to discipline in the rendering of form. The temporary difficulty, however, was admirably overcome through Hunt's ingenious suggestion, by which what ought to be done was converted into a part of what Rossetti wanted to do. So delighted was Rossetti with this

practical advice that he asked to be allowed to share a studio which Hunt was about to take at 7 (later 46) Cleveland Street. In some manner or other Rossetti managed to release himself from Brown's custody without exciting the wrath of that susceptible painter—who remained his close friend and occasional adviser—and the autumn of 1848 found Hunt and Rossetti established in Cleveland Street, and the latter at work on the still-life in his first picture, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*.

Mr. William Bell Scott, with whom Rossetti had opened an acquaintance by one of his characteristic letters, retails in his 'Autobiographical Notes' a visit paid to the pair shortly after their occupation. The studio is described as 'a room not very commodious for two,' furnished with the then inevitable lay-figure in all its loveliness. 'They were both working in the quite novel manner of elaboration as yet untalked of, kept secret apparently. . . . Holman Hunt's picture was the *Oath of Rienzi over the body of his brother* . . . and I was made to observe that the chain mail in his picture was articulated perfectly, and as an armourer would construct it, every ring holding four other rings in its grasp—a miracle of elaboration.

'Rossetti, the man I had come to see, was painting a subject wholly in the spirit of the poems which had

reached me under a cover inscribed “Songs of the Art Catholic.” It was the *The Girlhood of the Virgin*. I thought at the first moment, “He is an Italian—a Romanist, of course—worshipping that young Nazarene, the ‘mother of the body of God,’ painting her and St. Anne from his own sister and mother; and here was St. Joseph without any joinery work; he had apparently turned *vigneron*—a prettier trade;<sup>1</sup> and here too was really the third person of the Trinity—not the symbolic dove with outspread wings that we moderns see in Masonic diplomas and what-not, but a natural dove, only within a nimbus, sitting on the vine.” The propensity to laugh was strong in a Scotchman who had absorbed in juvenile years the “Philosophical Dictionary,” although he had tried his hand poetically in a semi-mediæval poem, or four poems, called “Four Acts of St. Cuthbert.” But admiration of this daring performance of a boy turning what was naturally a lyrical subject into a picture, and this his first adventure in painting, was something quite new. I saw at once that he had possibly never before used even a piece of chalk. He was painting in oils with water-colour brushes, as thinly as in water-colour, on canvas which he had primed with white till the surface was as smooth

<sup>1</sup> Here Mr. Bell Scott is clearly in error, the person represented being, of course, not St. Joseph but St. Joachim.

as cardboard, and every tint remained transparent. I saw at once, too, that he was not an orthodox boy, but acting purely from the æsthetic motive; the mixture of genius and dilettanteism of both the men shut me up for the moment, and whetted my curiosity for all the year till I should see them again.'

According to Mr. Holman Hunt—and there is no reason to doubt his word—the formation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood dates from the evening when he, Millais, and Rossetti together inspected the Campo Santo engravings. The term pre-Raphaelite, as already shown, was adopted by them from the nickname bestowed by those who scoffed at their theories, but the word 'Brotherhood' was put forward by Rossetti as preferable to club, association, or society. Its guiding principles appear to have been evolved at their studio principally by Hunt and Rossetti, who in a letter to his brother, dated August, 1848, says: 'Hunt and I have prepared a list of Immortals forming our creed, and to be pasted up in our study for the affixing of all decent fellows' signatures. It has already caused considerable horror among our acquaintance. I suppose we shall have to keep a hair-brush. The list contains four distinct classes of immortality, in the first of which three stars are attached to each name, in the second two, in the third one, and in the fourth none. The

RRB-  
family

p. 23



THE GIRLHOOD OF MARY VIRGIN



first class consists only of Jesus Christ and Shakespear. We are also about to transcribe various passages from our poets, together with forcible and correct sentiments, to be stuck up about the walls.'

The members of the Brotherhood were to meet monthly at the abode of each brother in rotation, and Mr. W. M. Rossetti interprets their bond of union to have been 'really and simply this: (1) To have genuine ideas to express; (2) To study nature attentively, so as to know how to express them; (3) To sympathise with what is direct and serious and heart-felt in previous art, to the exclusion of what is conventional and self-parading and learnt by rote; and (4), and most indispensable of all, to produce thoroughly good pictures and statues.' This declaration of faith leaves something to be desired in definiteness, but it is less vague than the 'revolt against convention' of other writers. But the real truth probably is that the aims of the brethren were not much more definite at the time than these general good intentions, and that by the light of subsequent events much has been read into the Brotherhood that was not originally there. One point to be noted is that the pre-Raphaelite notion of truth to nature inclined more towards accuracy of detail than that truth to general effect recommended by Reynolds, a

master, by the way, whom the Brethren were in the habit of dismissing contemptuously as 'Sir Sloshua.' This disparaging attitude towards Reynolds undoubtedly arose from a hearty dislike of all dark bituminous painting, and in their love for bright colour and determination to paint their pictures in a higher key than that then in vogue, the pre-Raphaelites did advance further towards the truth of nature's own lighting, and in so doing prepared the way for the next great artistic revolution of luminist or 'impressionist' painting.

1853 Altogether, it is very easy to exaggerate the importance of the 'Brotherhood,' which did not amount to much more than a small social club, which, as such, died a lingering death five years after its foundation. Its importance rests in its having brought Hunt, Millais, and Rossetti into closer intimacy—if it can be said to have done so much; in having given birth to 'The Germ,' a periodical which had results more important to literature than to art; and in bringing upon the three chief brethren a storm of obloquy and consequent notoriety which they might otherwise have escaped.

The man who had as much influence on Rossetti as any living painter, Ford Madox Brown, was never a member of the P. R. B. Mr. Hunt says he was not

asked, others say he refused to join because he did not approve of cliques and coteries. But the fact that 'willy-nilly' he has been dragged into the movement all the same, shows how little the Brotherhood really had to do with it. The idea of extending the Brotherhood to others beyond the three founders may be traced to Rossetti, who was more filled with proselytising zeal than the other two. Hunt brought in Frederick George Stephens, then a student at the Academy; Rossetti, a painter called James Collinson, and his brother William Michael Rossetti; and the seventh member was the sculptor Thomas Woolner, known to all three founders, but possibly the nominee of Millais. Although Woolner made some reputation eventually as a sculptor, he is now only remembered through his connection with the three founders. Collinson never attained distinction as a painter, became a Roman Catholic, and for religious reasons sent in his resignation in 1850, when he was succeeded by Walter Howell Deverell, who was destined to have a lasting influence on Rossetti's private life. The two remaining brothers have hitherto met with far less attention than they deserve, though after the three founders they are the only members of any importance. W. M. Rossetti, never a painter, was appointed Secretary to the Brotherhood, his duty

being to keep a journal in which were to be recorded not only its transactions as a body, but as fully as possible the achievements of each individual member. His real usefulness to the Brotherhood, however, was not so much his private function as secretary as his public championship of the pre-Raphaelite cause, when in 1850 he became art critic first to 'The Critic,' and afterwards to 'The Spectator.' Almost about the same time, or shortly after, Mr. Stephens abandoned painting for criticism, so that at the outset the rebels were not without organs through which to trumpet forth to the public their ideals. Sufficient stress has never yet been laid on the fact that, notwithstanding the hostile reception first given to the P. R. B., the battle was brief, if fierce, and after Ruskin had come to their rescue, Rossetti and his allies practically captured the Press, and for many years had an almost controlling influence on criticism.

Altogether, the history of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood as an organisation is less interesting and far less important than that of its three founders, who, in the winter of 1848-9, were hard at work on the pictures which were to give concrete form to their ideals. In order to show the public 'their close connexion in purpose and in work,' it is said that all three originally intended to take the subjects of their pictures

from Keats. However, if this arrangement was ever come to, which may be doubted, Millais was the only one to carry it out in his *Lorenzo and Isabella*, Hunt and Rossetti, as we have seen, choosing other subjects. All three, it is worth noting, used their friends and relatives for their pictures in preference to professional models. Rossetti found time to sit to Hunt for his *Rienzi*, while painting his sister Christina and his mother as Mary and St. Anne. As contradicting a prevalent belief that an early rule of the Brotherhood forbade any deviation from the model, it should be mentioned that Rossetti did not scruple to change Christina's dark brown into golden hair, a change also made by Millais when painting his *Lorenzo* from W. M. Rossetti. Although now seriously at work as a painter, and curbing his 'unchecked impatience at difficulties' under friend Hunt's remonstrances, Rossetti continued to produce poetically as well as pictorially, and wrote the well-known sonnet setting forth the conception of the picture :

This is that Blessed Mary, pre-elect  
 God's Virgin. Gone is a great while since she  
 Dwelt thus in Nazareth of Galilee.  
 Loving she was, with temperate respect :  
 A profound simpleness of intellect  
 Was hers, and extreme patience. From the knee  
 Faithful and hopeful ; wise in charity ;

Strong in grave peace ; in duty circumspect.  
Thus held she through her girlhood, as it were  
    An angel-watered lily that near God  
    Grows and is quiet. Till one dawn, at home  
She woke in her white bed, and had no fear  
At all, yet wept for a brief period,  
    Because the fullness of the time was come.

This sonnet, printed both on the frame of the picture and in the catalogue, is typical of the merits and shortcomings of Rossetti's poetry, memorable phrases, and woeful lapses. The last five lines are especially beautiful with the exception of that unhappy blot, 'a brief period,' in the last line but one. Rossetti's poetry, as a whole, must be reserved for later discussion, but this line, at least, serves to point Leigh Hunt's shrewd judgment, 'I guess, indeed, that you are altogether not so musical as pictorial.'

Millais and Hunt, as former exhibitors, naturally sent their pictures to the Royal Academy. Rossetti, proud and prudent, would risk no rejection, and accordingly sent his work to what was known as the Free Exhibition, near Hyde Park Corner. In this he was probably guided by Ford Madox Brown, who had exhibited his *Wiclif reading his Translation of the New Testament to John of Gaunt* there in 1848, and was sending again in 1849. Inasmuch as the public had to pay for admission to this exhibition, it is advisable

to point out that it received its name because any artist was free to exhibit his work there if he paid for his space. Although these exhibitions came to an end about 1855, it is interesting to remember that this most logical and fair-minded principle has been successfully developed in Paris by the *Société des Artistes Indépendants*, and revived in London by the recently founded artists' association, which held its first salon at the Albert Hall this year (1908).

The Free Exhibition opening in March, Rossetti was the first of the Brethren to challenge a verdict, and his initial effort met with a most favourable reception. *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* was praised at length in the 'Athenæum' and other journals of standing as 'a manifestation of true mental power,' and the picture was purchased for £80 by the Dowager Marchioness of Bath, to whom 'Aunt Charlotte' was now companion. Thus the generous aunt who had helped to defray the cost of his artistic training was, more or less directly, an agent in his first sale.

Millais and Hunt were well hung at the Academy, and their pictures favourably reviewed, so that altogether the Brethren had a most encouraging start, and nobody seems to have made much remark about the letters P.R.B. which followed their signatures. Rossetti, whose literary ambitions, whether consciously or no,

## 42 DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

always kept pace with his artistic, was no doubt encouraged by this success to take steps to secure the publication of a magazine in which P.R.B. ideas might be ventilated, a project which he had been turning over in his mind for some time. Before the magazine definitely took shape, however, Hunt and Rossetti made a little tour in France and Belgium, visiting Amiens, Paris, Brussels, Ghent, Bruges, etc. Rossetti's letters home during this tour reveal at once the extreme narrowness of his artistic sympathies, the intensity of his prejudices, and the immaturity of his critical powers. He admires the Mantegnas and Leonardos, but 'Hunt and I solemnly decided that the most perfect works, taken *in toto*, that we have seen in our lives are two pictures by Hippolyte Flandrin'! On the other hand, Delacroix is 'a perfect beast,' the school of David is 'greatly his superiors,' one picture by Ingres is 'exquisite perfection,' the rest are 'filthy slosh,' a copy of Michael Angelo's *Judgment* is admitted to be 'an admirable copy, I believe, but one of the most comic performances I ever saw in my life.' When he comes to the Museum at Brussels he perceives one room 'full of Rubenses, and so held aloof.' Although Rossetti was only twenty-one at this time, one would have expected more discrimination from a young man of his attainments. Many of these verdicts, notably those on

Ruskin  
letters

Delacroix, Michael Angelo, and Hippolyte Flandrin, were reversed in later life, but throughout his life Rossetti retained sufficient prejudices to confirm the assertion that the creative gift is not always accompanied by the critical faculty. Indeed, when we find Rossetti pausing to write a sonnet before a Giorgione or an Ingres, we feel that he is never a painter looking at paintings, but always a poet, looking for illustration or inspiration. It was a pity that Millais was unable to accompany the two fanatics of the Brotherhood. He would surely have brought more balance and sanity into their criticism, and perhaps restrained Rossetti from his dithyrambic wholesale condemnation of the works of Correggio, *et hoc genus omne*, as 'blots and glares, uncouth with stagnant grouts of paint.'

but this  
was normal  
during the gothic  
Revival.  
(= Ruskin)

### III

## MISS SIDDAL AND RUSKIN

WHATEVER disputes may have arisen as to who was primarily responsible for the formation of the P.R.B., there is no doubt whatsoever that its organ, 'The Germ,' was due to the initiative of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. 'He was eager to distinguish himself in literature, no less than painting, and wanted to have some safe vehicle both for ushering his writings before the public and for diffusing abroad the Pre-Raphaelite principles in art. I feel pretty sure,' says his brother, 'that at first every one of his colleagues regarded the enterprise as rash, costly, foredoomed to failure, and an interruption to other more pressing and less precarious work.' But Rossetti was not to be denied. The expenses were to be met by equal contributions from the members of the P.R.B. and other persons whose support was to be enlisted. In October, 1849, Rossetti had moved to a new studio at 72 Newman Street, and here, on December 19, a decisive meet-

ing was held of all interested in the undertaking. In addition to the seven members of the P.R.B., the persons present included Ford Madox Brown, Deverell, and the two brothers Tupper, of whom one, George, was a member of the friendly printing firm without whose support the venture would have been even more short-lived than it was, while the other, J. L. Tupper, was a future contributor of excellent articles on ‘The Subject in Art.’ The promoters had experienced much difficulty in finding a suitable title for the magazine, which was projected to contain about forty pages of prose and poetry, as well as two etchings, and to be sold at one shilling. Rossetti’s first thought of ‘Monthly Thoughts in Literature, Poetry, and Art’ was dismissed as being too cumbrous, and his second suggestion, ‘Thoughts towards Nature,’ was considered still too long and indefinite. Finally, three titles were submitted to the meeting—‘The Seed,’ ‘The Scroll,’ and ‘The Germ’—the last of which was eventually chosen by six votes to four.

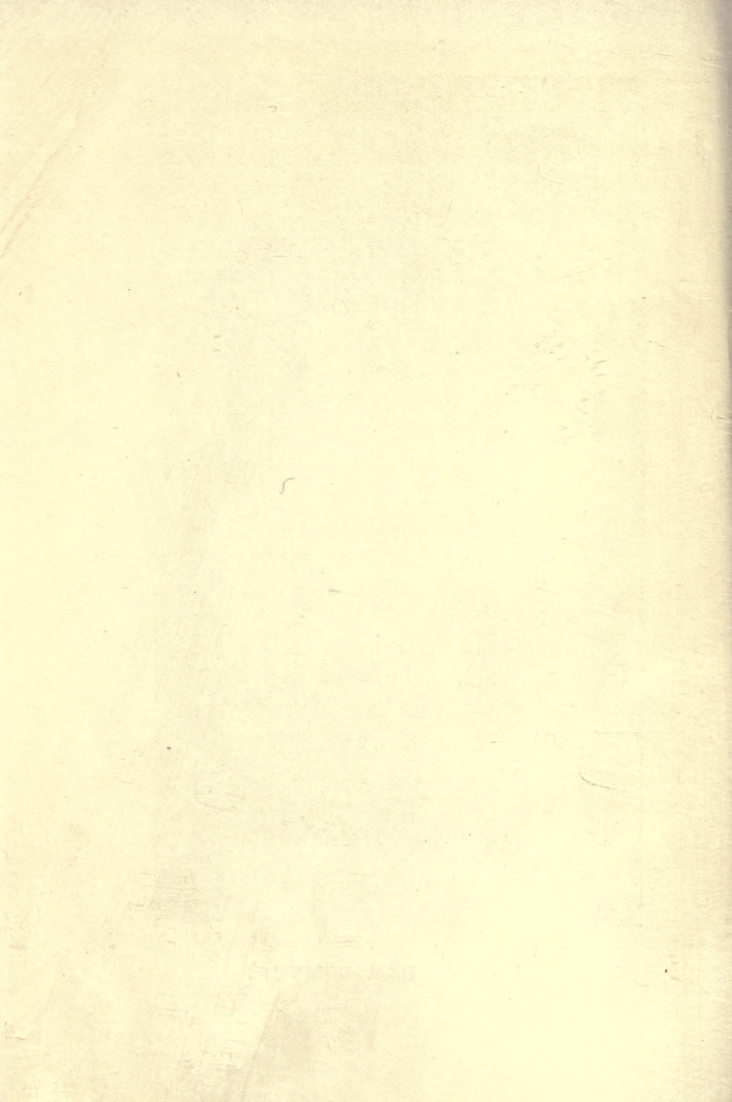
The first number made its appearance in the following January, and contained an etching by Holman Hunt, poems by Coventry Patmore, Woolner, Ford Madox Brown, Christina, Dante Gabriel, and W. M. Rossetti, critical papers by the last and J. L. Tupper, and last, but by no means least, the prose romance ‘Hand and

Soul,' perhaps the most flawless work of all Rossetti's varied achievements. It will always be a matter for regret that, with his almost whole-souled concentration on romance and his conspicuous gifts as a prose-writer, Rossetti left himself no time to reap the harvest he might have gathered in a field of literature for which he was peculiarly fitted. He was born to be a teller of strange tales, and if he chose to tell them in pictures and ballads, his exquisite 'Hand and Soul' leaves no doubt that he could have told them equally well, perhaps more impeccably, in the more appropriate medium of prose.

Although the first number of 'The Germ' enjoyed a distinct *succès d'estime*, and received laudatory notices in several journals, its financial results were disappointing. About two hundred only out of the seven hundred copies printed were sold. The second number was still less fortunate, though it contained the first version of Rossetti's 'Blessed Damozel.' The friendly printing firm brought out the second and third numbers at its own risk, changing the title to 'Art and Poetry : Being Thoughts Towards Nature,' among Rossetti's contributions to these two numbers being 'From the Cliffs : Noon,' afterwards called 'Sea Limits,' and six 'Sonnets for Pictures,' Memling, Mantegna, Ingres, and Giorgione. It is interesting to note the changes



ECCE ANCILLA DOMINI



Rossetti made in the conclusion to the last sonnet, which ran originally—

Let be :

Do not now speak unto her lest she weep,

Nor name this ever. Be it as it was :

Silence of heat and solemn poetry.

Nearly twenty years later Rossetti corrected these lines to—

Let be :

Say nothing now unto her lest she weep,

Nor name this ever. Be it as it was,

Life touching lips with immortality.

In a long letter to his brother, Rossetti justified the alterations. 'Solemn poetry,' he writes, 'belongs to the class of phrase absolutely forbidden, I think, in poetry. It is intellectually incestuous—poetry seeking to beget its emotional offspring on its own identity. Whereas, I see nothing too "ideal" in the present line. It gives only the momentary contact with the immortal, which results from sensuous culmination, and is always a half-conscious element of it.' The improvement, of course, is obvious, but Rossetti does not appear to have realised that this is more a question of sound than of sense—a question of more melodious assonance and accentuation : and the victory is due to the eviction, not so much of the word 'poetry,' but of the offending sibilants, and the arrangement of the labials (*f p m*) into

a lovelier sequence. So greatly do the beauties of poetry depend on mere arrangements of vowels and consonants. The change in the last line but two, from 'Do not now speak' to 'Say nothing now,' is an instructive example of the difference between pleasant and unpleasant alliteration, the art whereof consists not in the knock-down, rat-tat repetition of a consonant, but in its balanced recurrence—its rise, fall, and resurrection in the course of a refrain.

With its fourth number the magazine expired, and the proprietors were left with a printer's bill of some thirty-three pounds—no heavy liability as printers' bills go, but none the less troublesome to the debtors. Finances apart, it cannot be considered altogether a failure, though it was unable to carry out its endeavour, as stated in the first number, 'to encourage and enforce an entire adherence to the simplicity of Nature; and also to direct attention, as an auxiliary medium, to the comparatively few works which Art has yet produced in this spirit.' It certainly obtained for the Rossettis a literary reputation in select, if not extended, circles. Dante Gabriel and Christina obtained thereby their first public recognition as poets, while W. M. Rossetti's articles therein paved the way for his appointment as art critic to more substantial periodicals.

Nevertheless 1850 was a disastrous year for the

P.R.B. The meaning of those initials had now leaked out, and the exhibition of their pictures was the signal for a bitter and most virulent attack on the theories and principles of the Brotherhood. Rossetti, who again showed at the Free Exhibition—now removed to Portland Place and entitled the National Institution—was the first to suffer from the changed attitude of the critics. His picture, suggested by the concluding lines of his own sonnet on his first oil painting, was entitled *Ecce Ancilla Domini*, now known as *The Annunciation*, and a national possession at the Tate Gallery. Neither the angel nor the Virgin was painted from any one person, and though Mary again resembles his sister Christina, the likeness is less striking than in the first picture, a fact sufficiently explained by the painter having also had recourse to sittings from a model, Miss Love. The angel’s head was painted from two male models and W. M. Rossetti. So much for the legendary rule of the Pre-Raphaelites forbidding any deviation from the model once chosen.

It may be admitted that when he painted this picture Rossetti was not the equal of Millais or even Holman Hunt in technical accomplishment. Yet even then he had, if it may be said without offence, a greater mind, and the charm of his *Annunciation* is not the actual painting but the poetic conception of

p. 46  
 the whole. The drawing is far from flawless; the form of the angel is loosely indicated rather than clearly expressed, and the Virgin herself would not bear the searching examination of an expert in anatomy. Her head appears to be several feet nearer to the spectator than the rest of her body, distances are confused, there is little or no atmosphere—in short, the picture is full of faults which would be more than sufficient to condemn most works from a realist's standpoint. But all these shortcomings are forgiven, because of the fervent sincerity of the painter which shines through his faulty technique. The scene conceived is so simple, so natural, so true, that we feel just so it might have happened. Symbolism is there, but it does not obtrude. The embroidery frame is not a stage accessory, but a reasonable incidental which completes the balance of the composition. The sweet colour scheme of blue and white is perfectly natural if also symbolical, while the slim, shrinking figure is the very embodiment of purity. Rossetti's *Annunciation* is an example in paint of the triumph of the spirit over the letter, and it is instructive to compare it with Mr. Hacker's rendering of the same subject, also at the Tate Gallery. Mr. Hacker comes into the field far better equipped technically, with far more knowledge of drawing and anatomy than Rossetti

ever possessed, but how has this availed him? How tawdry, how affected and theatrical does his version appear beside the spiritual simplicity of the Rossetti?

That so beautiful, so reverent and obviously sincere a painting as this last could have aroused on its exhibition a tornado of vulgar abuse, only proves what cruel injustice and false criticism may result from the habit of judging works of art by preconceived opinions, judging them, that is to say, not by what they are, but by what according to the spectator they should have been. As 'a manifestation of true mental power,' the *Ecce Ancilla Domini* of 1850 was as impressive as *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* of 1849. But in 1850, the 'Athenæum' has discovered the significance of 'P.R.B.' and arrogates to itself the right of chastising the painter for his heretical opinions instead of confining its attention to an analysis of the qualities of his performance. We hear no more of 'true mental power,' for now 'an unintelligent imitation of the mere technicalities of old art—golden glories, fanciful scribblings on the frames, and other infantine absurdities—constitutes all its claim.' 'Mr Rossetti' is now only to be numbered among 'the slavish imitators of artistic inefficiency,' though only a twelvemonth ago the 'sincerity and earnestness' of his first picture had 'forcibly' reminded the same journal 'of the feeling

with which the early Florentine monastic painters wrought.'

Holman Hunt's *Christian Missionary persecuted by the Druids*, and Millais' *Christ in the House of His Parents* (the 'Carpenter's Shop') met with no less rough a handling at the Academy, and Charles Dickens, to his eternal disgrace, wrote a scurrilous attack denouncing the picture of Millais as if it was a blasphemy. Indeed, the epithets bestowed on Rossetti were nothing compared to the adjectives with which Hunt and Millais were bombarded. It is difficult for us nowadays to understand why so furious an onslaught should have been made on the three young painters, and the only explanation which occurs is Johnson's immortal rejoinder, 'Ignorance, my dear madam, pure ignorance.' The public, knowing little what the painters were about, and still less of painting, were led to view their endeavours as youth presuming to instruct age and experience. The painters, victims of a professional inquisition, were condemned as much for their beliefs as their performances, though the bright, truer colouring of these were suspect in the eyes of a gloomy and bituminous generation of artists. But deadlier than all this was a rumour that these pictures, all three having a subject more or less connected with religion, were part and parcel of

insidious Roman-Catholic propaganda. Protestantism flew to arms, with ‘No Popery!’ for its battle-cry, and morality made as big a fool of itself as it habitually does when it interferes in questions of art.

1850

✓

The dogged determination of Holman Hunt and the *insouciance* of Millais enabled them to weather the storm with more fortitude than Rossetti. His sensitive nature would feel attacks more keenly, but it is untrue to say that in consequence of these he determined never to exhibit in public again. As a matter of fact, he intended to exhibit in the following year, and in September he writes to his brother : ‘Having found it impossible to get the Browning picture ready for next exhibition, I have designed the subject I mentioned to you from “Much Ado About Nothing,” and shall begin to paint it in a very few days.’ The ‘very few days,’ however, lengthened out to never, and the Shakespearian project—Benedict kissing Beatrice—remained a design, though the ‘Browning picture’ became *Hist! said Kate the Queen*. In October he went with Holman Hunt to ‘study nature’ at Seven-oaks, and painted a woodland background which remained unused for many years, but developed in 1872 into *The Bower Meadow*. He was full of ideas as ever, but whether he was really unsettled by the hostile criticisms or distracted by divided aims—always his

1851

danger—he was for some time only able to plan and commence pictures, but not to carry them out.

It was a critical period for Rossetti. His picture remained unsold till 1853, when it was purchased by Mr. Francis McCracken, a Belfast shipowner. His father was practically incapacitated by continued ill-health, and the household at Charlotte Street was kept going by the slender earnings of W. M. Rossetti as a Government clerk, of the elder sister as a governess, and the forlorn attempts of his mother and Christina to give Italian lessons. The situation demanded the immediate production of saleable pictures, but Dante Gabriel could not achieve the humblest pot-boiler. When he should have given his whole energy to painting he wavered again towards literature, and it was actually at just about this time that he wrote, or re-wrote, some of his finest poems—‘The Burden of Nineveh,’ ‘Sister Helen,’ ‘The Bride’s Prelude,’ ‘Stratton Water,’ and ‘Jenny.’ His great picture *Found*, the pictorial counterpart to this last, was begun a few years later.

How Rossetti lived at this time is something of a mystery, notwithstanding the continued generosity of his aunt Charlotte and the ‘few pounds’ which his mother from time to time managed to lend him from her own necessities. That he had no oil painting ready



FOUND



for exhibition in 1851 may not inconceivably have been due, at least partly, to real want of means to afford materials and models. At all events, he welcomes a remittance from his aunt in February, 1851, as 'the means of dispensing with further delay in my picture.' In this letter he dutifully observes that it is 'very necessary' for him to 'occupy myself constantly with my real career as a painter, and put aside that kind of minor employment, either in writing or designing.' Notwithstanding this proper sentiment, the fact remains that Rossetti's pictorial productions during the next few years cannot for one moment vie with the importance of his poetical, and the former were, almost exclusively, drawings and water-colours.

At the time of this letter to his aunt, Rossetti had given up his room in Newman Street, and was working in the studio of his friend Deverell, at 17 Red Lion Square, and it was here that he became acquainted with the future Mrs. Rossetti. The story of her 'discovery' has frequently been told, but it will bear repetition.

Walter Howell Deverell was a son of the Secretary of the Government Schools of Design. He was a good-looking, lovable, talented youth, likely to have attained distinction in his art but for his early death, in 1854, at the age of twenty-six. Early in 1850

Deverell, accompanying his mother to a bonnet-shop near Leicester Square, saw among the assistants a tall, dignified young woman, with blue-green eyes, a mass of hair like burnished copper, and of regular but uncommon features. She impressed him as being the ideal model he desired for Viola in the picture he was engaged in painting from 'Twelfth Night,' and he besought his mother to inquire whether she would consent to give him sittings. The request was granted, and at Deverell's studio the milliner, turned model, made the acquaintance of Rossetti and other members of the Brotherhood.

Her name was Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal, and she was the daughter of a Sheffield cutler, who afterwards removed to Newington Butts. Though she had had little education beyond what her own reading in leisure hours afforded, she was singularly refined by nature, and her sweet disposition and uncommon appearance made a profound impression on Rossetti. When Miss Siddal began sitting to Deverell she was only just, if not under, seventeen years of age; Rossetti, who sat to Deverell for the Jester, in the same picture, was nearing twenty-two. Under Deverell's chaperonage his two sitters soon fell deeply in love with each other, and became definitely engaged in little more than a twelvemonth after their first meeting. Miss Siddal

appears to have been endowed by nature with some literary and artistic talent, and this was assiduously cherished and cultivated by Rossetti. He incited her to versify and paint, as well as painting or drawing from her constantly himself, his first rendering of her as Beatrice being in the water-colour *Beatrice at a Marriage Feast Denies Dante Salutation*, the first of his long series of Dantesque pictures, and almost the only 'professional' work—in spite of his aunt's expectations—which he appears to have accomplished in Deverell's studio. It was not till November, 1852, that Rossetti moved to 14 Chatham Place, Blackfriars Bridge, where he remained for ten years till his wife's death, in 1862.

Meanwhile Hunt and Millais, undisturbed by love or poetry, were resolutely getting ready their exhibits for the Academy of 1851. Hunt chose his subject from the 'Two Gentlemen of Verona,' and painted his *Sylvia* from Miss Siddal. Millais, always a more facile and rapid executant than his colleagues, sent three oil paintings, *The Woodman's Daughter*, *The Return of the Dove to the Ark*, and *Mariana*. All four works were hung, but the critics again were hostile, the 'Times' leading the attack against 'affected simplicity, senile imitations of a cramped style, false perspective, crude colours, morbid infatuation, and the sacrifice of beauty,

truth, and genuine feeling to mere eccentricity.' But now at last an unexpected champion appeared.

Millais was greatly agitated by the bitterness and injustice of the attacks made on his works, and confided his distress to Coventry Patmore, who immediately enlisted Ruskin's sympathy on his friend's behalf. Already Ruskin's father had been favourably impressed by the work of Millais, and had expressed a desire to buy *The Return of the Dove* had this work not been already sold. It would have shown his critical discernment more clearly had Ruskin come forward in 1850, when he paid no attention to their work, but, once roused by Patmore, he certainly made up for lost time. In two trenchant letters to the 'Times' for May 13 and 30 he praised the 'truth, power, and finish' of the Pre-Raphaelite works, and went on to say, 'There has been nothing in art so earnest or so complete as these pictures since the days of Albert Durer'; and so great at that time was the influence of the 'Graduate of Oxford' that these two letters and a pamphlet on 'Pre-Raphaelitism,' which he published in the same year, sufficed to revolutionise public opinion.

Not before it was wanted came this great and unexpected encouragement. Even Holman Hunt had been despondent and thought of emigrating to Canada, Woolner of going to Australia, whither a year later

he went, though he returned to become a Royal Academician. Rossetti, not exhibiting this year, was less directly affected by the change, though he must have been cheered by his comrades' triumph. Moreover, Ruskin's pamphlet, falling to W. M. Rossetti to review in the 'Spectator,' gave that writer an opportunity to vindicate his brother, who is asked by Dante Gabriel 'to dwell particularly on the fact that my religious subjects have been entirely independent in treatment of any other corresponding representation, and, indeed, altogether original in the inventions.' It is only right to add, however, that Rossetti had no wish to be unduly exalted, and after reading his brother's first article on the subject in manuscript, he wrote with characteristic generosity: 'Are you aware, too, that you have not referred to any work of Hunt, though giving a minute analysis of one of Millais and of mine? I would not for the world that the long paragraph about me should appear without reference to Hunt. Indeed, I think it too long in any case, and would seem like personal bias to some. I wish, too, you would put the one about Millais first; also that you would not attempt to defend my mediævalisms, which *were* absurd, but rather say that there was enough good in the work to give assurance that these were merely superficial.'

Although Ruskin's championship of the Pre-Raphaelite cause had brought him into touch with Hunt and Millais, it was not till three years later that he got to know Rossetti. During these years Rossetti's chief support, apart from the ever-ready Aunt Charlotte, had been the Belfast gentleman who bought *The Annunciation*, Mr. McCracken, with whom Ruskin was acquainted. After 'resting'—in theatrical parlance—for a couple of years, at the beginning of 1853 Rossetti exhibited three small water-colours, *Giotto Painting the Portrait of Dante*, *Beatrice at a Marriage Feast*, and *Rossovestita*, an early and more or less fancy portrait of Miss Siddal which Rossetti had given to Madox Brown. Ruskin, apparently, visited the exhibition, and was so impressed that he wrote McCracken 'some enthusiastic praises (though with obtuse accompaniments) upon one of them—I cannot make out which—and McCracken seems excited, wanting it.' So Rossetti, in a letter to Madox Brown, and in another letter to the same dated April 14, 1854, rather more than thirteen months later, the sequel is related. McCracken, having purchased the water-colour of *Dante Drawing an Angel in Memory of Beatrice*, 'of course sent my drawing to Ruskin, who the other day wrote me an incredible letter about it, remaining mine respectfully (!!), and wanting to call. I



MISS SIDDAL



of course stroked him down nicely in my answer, and yesterday he called. His manner was more agreeable than I had always expected. . . . He seems in a mood to make my fortune.' And, indeed, Ruskin did, before the end of the year, make a very generous offer to Rossetti. In passing it is curious to note, however, that he would have nothing to do with Ford Madox Brown, whose art to the end of his life Ruskin failed to appreciate.

But before Ruskin's offer was made and accepted, Rossetti had troublous days. Within a fortnight of Ruskin's visit Gabriele Rossetti died, and immediately after his father's funeral Rossetti was called to Hastings. Miss Siddal, always delicate, had developed a tendency to consumption, and her suffering state of health necessitated sea-air. To Hastings she was sent accordingly, whither Rossetti joined her. Depressed by the death of his father, anxious about his fiancée, away from his studio and without the materials for his craft, Rossetti's stay at Hastings plunged him into fresh financial difficulties. Returning at length to his studio at Chatham Place, he gives a clear statement of his difficulties in a letter to his aunt.

'I have two water-colours in hand,' he writes, 'and am beginning an oil picture. The last, and one of the

former, I believe I may consider already sold (to Messrs. Ruskin and McCracken) as soon as they are finished, but meanwhile I am utterly at a loss for the means of getting models, etc., to carry them on. One of the water-colours, at any rate, I hope will not be very long before it is finished, if I am only able to go on with it without being swamped for want of money. . . . Could you lend me £25, or if possible £30? . . . Less than £20 it would be of little service to me to ask, as it would be merely to fall into difficulties again immediately before I had been able to make any considerable progress with my pictures.' To this letter, written in August, 1854, his aunt replies almost by return, enclosing the required sinews of war; and by October, Rossetti is unexpectedly and finally relieved from the necessity of making similar requests.

About the time that Rossetti went to Hastings, Ruskin, who had been experiencing domestic troubles of his own, went abroad; but though it was some months before they met each other again, letters were exchanged and the acquaintance developed. From Chamounix Ruskin commissions a water-colour, and sends Rossetti a complete set of his writings. While in Switzerland he appears to have got some inkling of the artist's embarrassed condition, and when he returned in October he made Rossetti a proposal whereby he

would undertake to purchase up to a certain annual maximum, at the artist's own prices, whatever of his productions were to Ruskin's liking. The latter is most carefully worded, to avoid giving any offence to the artist's susceptibilities—always easily aroused—and contains some remarkable self-revelations, made, one can only suppose, to persuade Rossetti that his acceptance of the offer would not place him under any obligation to the writer.

‘I believe,’ begins Ruskin pathetically, ‘I once had affections as warm as most people, but partly from evil chance, and partly from foolish misplacing of them, they have got tumbled down and broken to pieces. It is a very great, in the long run the greatest, misfortune of my life that, on the whole, my relations, cousins and so forth, are persons with whom I can have no sympathy, and that circumstances have always somehow or other kept me out of the way of the people of whom I could have made friends. So that I have no friendships and no loves.

‘Now you know the best and worst of me, and you may rely upon it, it is the truth. If you hear people say I am utterly hard and cold, depend upon it, it is untrue. Though I have no friendships and loves, I cannot read the epitaph of the Spartans at Thermopylae with a steady voice to the end, and there is an old

glove in one of my drawers that has lain there these eighteen years, which is worth something to me yet. If, on the other hand, you ever feel disposed to think me particularly good, you will be just as wrong as most people are on the other side. My pleasures are in seeing, thinking, reading, and making people happy (if I can, consistently with my own comfort). And I *take* these pleasures. And I suppose, if my pleasures were in smoking, betting, dicing, and giving pain, I should take *those* pleasures. It seems to me that one man is made one way and one another—the measure of effort and self-denial can never be known except by each conscience to itself. Mine is small enough.

‘But, besides taking pleasure thus where I happen to find it, I have a theory of life which it seems to me impossible, as a rational being, to be altogether without, namely, that we are all sent into the world to be of such use to each other as we can, and also that my particular use is likely to be in the things that I know something about, that is to say, in matters connected with painting. Thus then it stands. It seems to me that, amongst all the painters I know, you, on the whole, have the greatest genius, and you appear to me also to be, as far as I can make out, a very good sort of person. I see that you are unhappy, and that you can’t bring out your genius as you should. It seems to

me then the proper and *necessary* thing, if I can, to make you more happy, and that I should be more really useful in enabling you to paint properly and keep your room in order than in any other way.

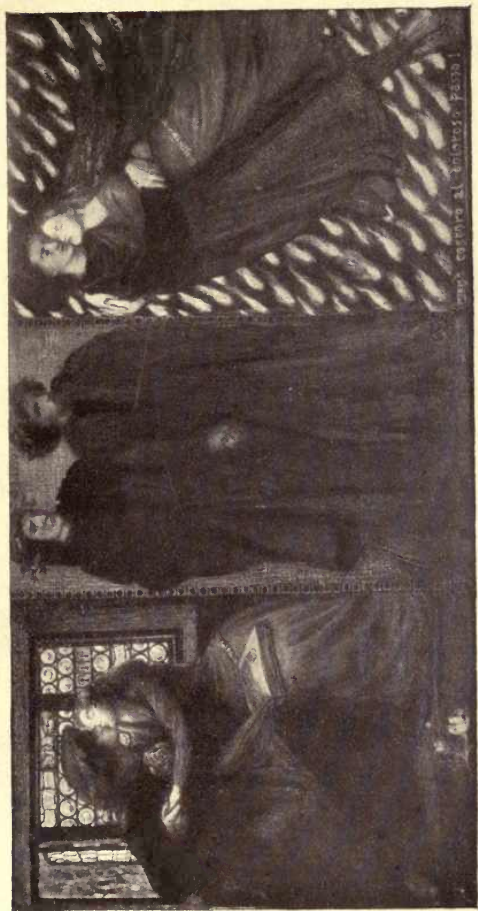
‘If it were necessary for me to deny myself, or to make any mighty exertions to do this, of course it might to you be a subject of gratitude, or a question if you should accept it or not. But, as I don’t happen to have any other objects in life, and as I have a comfortable room and all I want in it—and more—it seems to me just as natural I should try to be of use to you as that I should offer you a cup of tea if I saw you were thirsty, and there was plenty in the teapot and I had got all I wanted.’

And then, in a *postscript*, Ruskin adds : ‘I forgot to say also that I really do *covet* your drawings as much as I covet Turner’s, only it is useless self-indulgence to buy Turner’s, and useful self-indulgence to buy yours.’ Is not this postscript delightful? and is it not typical of the great child-heart of the man? This naive after-thought reminds one of some simple-minded lover who, after he has set forth in a lengthy speech numerous cogent, economical, and moral reasons why the young woman should marry him, casually adds at the finish, ‘I forgot to say also that I really do *love* you.’

#### IV

### OXFORD AND MARRIED LIFE

THE commencement of Rossetti's friendship with Ruskin very nearly coincided with the final dissolution and dispersal of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Millais, in November, 1853, was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy, Woolner had gone to Australia, Holman Hunt shortly after departed on his first pilgrimage to Palestine, and poor Deverell, who succeeded Collinson, had died in February, 1854. All these, with the exception of Woolner, henceforward pass out of Rossetti's life, and if he had no actual rupture with Millais and Holman Hunt, increasing coolness and diverse interests resulted in what practically amounted to cessation of acquaintance. Soon their place in his affections is taken by others not less famous, and in the new circle of which Rossetti is the centre almost the only familiar faces we meet are those of Ford Madox Brown and occasionally the faithful Stephens.



PAOLO AND FRANCESCA



It was, therefore, something of a new life that Rossetti began under Ruskin's protection at Chatham Place in the autumn of 1854. For the next few years Rossetti devotes himself resolutely to his work as a painter, Miss Siddal being his model for all his leading female personages. At first he produced chiefly in water-colour, one of the most important of the earlier pieces being the *Paolo and Francesca* triptych. His subjects at this time are mostly taken from Dante. In 1856 he was commissioned through his friend, Mr. John P. Seddon, the architect, to paint a triptych, *The Seed of David*, for the reredos of Llandaff Cathedral, and about the same time, or a little later, he was invited by Mr. Moxon to contribute five designs to that publisher's 'Illustrated Tennyson,' designs which contributed in no small degree to heightening Rossetti's reputation and exerted a far-reaching influence on book-illustration.

Meanwhile Ruskin, like a fairy-godfather, was looking after Miss Siddal as well as her betrothed. He had the greatest admiration for this 'noble, glorious creature,' and in the spring of 1855 he generously settled on her an annual £150, taking in exchange her various works up to that value. This arrangement, however—welcome as it must have been—only lasted about two years, because Miss Siddal's

very frail state did not permit her to produce drawings or paintings with any regularity, and notwithstanding Ruskin's readiness to continue the allowance all the same, Rossetti had a conscientious objection when Miss Siddal was no longer able to fulfil her part of the bargain. In June, 1855, Ruskin, interesting himself in Miss Siddal's health, gave her an introduction to Dr. Acland of Oxford, whose guest she remained for some little time. Rossetti visited her there, and thus began his connexion with Oxford. Dr. Acland advised Miss Siddal to leave England before the cold weather began and, thanks to the arrangement with Ruskin, she was enabled to spend the winter of 1855-6 in the south of France; though this, like so many other excursions in search of more favourable climatic conditions, appears to have produced no permanent improvement in her health.

Shortly after his acquaintance with Ruskin, Rossetti, partly affected by the latter's enthusiasm and partly no doubt as a small return for his friend's generosity, volunteered to take a class at the Working Men's College in Great Ormond Street, and it was here in 1856 that he was first seen by one of the two Oxford undergraduates who were soon to take the place of the friends from whom he had become separated. Burne-Jones himself has told the story of their first meeting.

1856  
Oxford  
Morris &  
Burne-Jones

In his own words he 'wanted to look' at the man whose poems and drawings he already so greatly admired, and hearing that he taught at the 'little university set up by Denison Maurice, where men skilled in science or history gave lectures and their services of evenings, I went to the College one day to find out how it would be possible that I should set eyes upon him.

'I was told,' Burne-Jones continues, 'that there was to be a monthly meeting that very evening . . . and that, for a modest payment, any one could get admittance, including tea, and hear the addresses on the condition of the College and the advancement of studies which were delivered by the different professors, so without fail I was there, and sat at a table and had thick bread and butter, but knowing no one. But good-fellowship was the rule there, that was clear, and a man sitting opposite to me spoke at once to me, introducing himself by the name of Furnival, and I gave my name and college and my reason for coming. He reached across the table to a kindly-looking man, whom he introduced to me as Vernon Lushington, and begged him to tell me when Rossetti entered the room. It seemed that it was doubtful if he would appear at all, that he was constant in his work of teaching drawing at the College, but had no great taste for the nights of addresses and speeches, and as I must have looked

downcast at this, Lushington, with a kindness never to be forgotten by me, invited me to go to his rooms in Doctors' Commons a few nights afterwards, where Rossetti had promised to come.'

After waiting an hour, however, Burne-Jones was rewarded by a glimpse of his hero, only he 'would not be introduced to him' then, leaving that joy for his visit to Vernon Lushington's rooms. Thither he goes on the night appointed, and by and by Rossetti came, and I was taken up to him and had my first fearful talk with him. . . . Before I left that night Rossetti bade me come to his studio next day. It was in the last house by Blackfriars Bridge, at the north-west corner of the bridge, long ago pulled down to make way for the Embankment, and I found him painting at a water-colour of a monk copying a mouse in an illumination. The picture was called *Fra Pace* afterwards. He received me courteously, and asked much about Morris, one or two of whose poems he knew already, and I think that was our principal subject of talk, for he seemed much interested about him. He showed me many designs for pictures: they tossed about everywhere in the room; the floor at one end was covered with them and with books. No books were on the shelves, and I remember, long afterwards, he once said that books were no use to a painter except

to prop up models in difficult positions, and that then they might be very useful. No one seemed to be in attendance upon him. I stayed long and watched him at work, not knowing till many a day afterwards that this was a thing he greatly hated, and when for shame I could stay no longer I went away, having carefully concealed from him the desire I had to be a painter.'

Soon afterwards, however, Burne-Jones showed Rossetti some of his drawings, and the latter, quick to divine the germs of genius, lost no time in urging him to adopt art as his profession. Through Burne-Jones Rossetti immediately became acquainted with Morris, whose poems he had seen in the 'Oxford and Cambridge Magazine,' a short-lived but brilliant undergraduate monthly, to which Rossetti himself contributed. Here, in June, 1856, he first published anonymously what is perhaps his noblest poem, 'The Burden of Nineveh,' written in 1850, and in the same pages appeared 'The Staff and Scrip' and a reprint, with slight alterations, of 'The Blessed Damozel.'

Some time before this meeting with Burne-Jones, Rossetti had been invited, through Ruskin, to do some designing work in connexion with the Oxford Museum, which had been placed in the hands of the architect Benjamin Woodward. Although there is no evidence to show that Rossetti himself had anything to do with

1856  
Oxford  
Museum  
Ruskin  
↓  
Rossetti

this structure beyond obtaining work there for three of his sculptor friends, Woolner,<sup>1</sup> Monro, and John Tupper, he had a great deal to do with another Oxford building with which Mr. Woodward was concerned. While visiting Oxford with this architect, shortly before the Long Vacation of 1857, it occurred to Rossetti that the bays of the Debating Hall (now the library) of the Union Society would be suitable for wall paintings. He suggested accordingly that they should be decorated with tempera pictures illustrating the Arthurian legends—a choice of subject in which it is not unreasonable to see the influence of Morris—and the requisite permission being obtained, he enlisted the services of a number of volunteers. Morris and Burne-Jones, of course, eagerly collaborated, while from London came Valentine Prinsep, Arthur Hughes, and Spencer Stanhope. None of these artists were paid

+ Rossetti

<sup>1</sup> Ford Madox Brown told an amusing story connected with Woolner's statue (Lord Bacon) for this building. It appears that Brown feared Woolner was making the statue too short. 'I proposed to Gabriel that we should go together, and insist upon the head being made smaller and the body longer. Rossetti said he would come, but I must be spokesman, as he funk'd it. However, while I was looking at the statue and thinking how to begin, Rossetti—who, by the way, had all along before sworn the statue was perfect—blurts out, "I say, that chap's too short, I certainly think." In this delicate way he broke the ice, and we began in earnest.'

for their services, though the living and travelling expenses of those not in residence at Oxford were borne by the Society, and as all concerned 'did themselves well,' as the phrase goes, the charges proved in the end much heavier than expected. The painting started gaily, though none of the painters knew much about wall painting, and in a letter to Madox Brown Rossetti unconsciously foretells the end—'It is very jolly work in itself, but really one is mad to do such things.' It is a thousand pities that Madox Brown was unable to come to Oxford and give the youthful band of enthusiasts the benefit of his experience, if not of his actual collaboration. Had he done so, in all probability the Oxford Union to-day would be as rich a treasure house as the Town Hall of Manchester.

But from beginning to end the project was a miserable failure, and the genius of the workmen defeated by their supreme ignorance of how to set about their work. 'The walls were new,' says Mr. W. M. Rossetti, 'and not properly prepared—not even flattened. The tempera-process adopted was little more than water-colour painting, and of course the pictures flaked off, becoming a phantom, and then a wreck.' Rossetti's two frescoes, *Sir Lancelot before the Shrine of the Sangrail* and *Sir Galahad receiving the Sangrail*, were never even finished, though, according to Burne-

Jones, they were not only the finest of the series, but belonged to 'the best time and highest character' of Rossetti's work.

Unfruitful directly, the Oxford adventure was not without important results, for during the painting at the Union, Rossetti met a young undergraduate who was to become his intimate friend, Algernon Charles Swinburne; and it was at the Oxford Theatre one evening that the three prime movers in the affair first saw that lovely lady Miss Jane Burden, whom Morris was to marry, Rossetti to immortalise.

*1856  
Jane Burden  
Morris*

Burne-Jones had already given up all thought of taking his degree and entering the Church, and since 1856 had been studying art in London. But although constantly with Rossetti, he was never actually his pupil. That he learned much from him, and of other things besides painting, is not to be denied, and of this indeed Burne-Jones himself has left eloquent testimony. 'He taught me to have no fear or shame of my own ideas, to design perpetually, to seek no popularity, to be altogether myself. . . . I remember that he discouraged me from study of the antique—the classical antique—giving as his reason that such study came too early in a man's life and was apt to crush out his individuality; adding that when a man had once found his own style and was much older and could front the



MARY AT THE DOOR OF SIMON



fear of being crushed, a year or so given to such study would be an excellent thing. So what I chiefly gained from him was not to be afraid of myself, but to do the thing I like most : but in those first years I never wanted to think but as he thought, and all he did and said fitted me through and through. He never harangued or persuaded, but had a gift of saying things authoritatively and not as the Scribes, such as I have never heard in any man. And mingled with this a humour that lightened his words of all heaviness, so that I went from him cheerful and solemn.'

In these days Morris, then articled to an architect at Oxford, would spend the week-end with his friends, and in his life of that multifarious genius Mr. Mackail gives a vivid little picture of these visits. 'He [Morris] used to arrive on Saturday in time to see pictures at the Academy or elsewhere, and go to a play with Burne-Jones and Rossetti in the evening. After the play—if Rossetti's imperious impatience of bad acting or bad plays allowed them to sit it out—they would go with him to his rooms on the Embankment overlooking Blackfriar's Bridge, and sit there till three or four in the morning, talking. All Sunday the talking, varied by reading of the "Morte d'Arthur," went on in the Chelsea lodging, Rossetti often looking in upon the other two in the afternoon. On the

Monday morning, Morris took the first train down to Oxford to be at Street's (the architect's) again when the office opened. During these months Rossetti's influence over him grew stronger and stronger. His doctrine that everybody should be a painter, enforced with all the weight of his immense personality and an eloquence and plausibility in talk which all who knew him describe as unparalleled in their experience, carried Morris for a time off his feet.'

When we remember Morris's own tremendous force of character and 'burly self-assertion'—Mr. Benson's phrase—the fact that he should have been so dominated for a time gives some idea of the extraordinary fascination Rossetti exercised over all with whom he came in contact.

*London* By Christmas, 1856, Rossetti had established Morris and Burne-Jones at 17 Red Lion Square, in the studio which he had himself occupied with Deverell, and here his two disciples remained for about three years, Burne-Jones paying periodical visits to Oxford and working on and off at the Union till February, 1858. For some reason or other Rossetti never returned there. Before his paintings were finished he had been called away from Oxford to Malvern, where Miss Siddal had another alarming relapse, and the comparative scantiness of his productions during the next two years, 1858-9,

may be traced to the same cause which left the Oxford paintings unfinished, namely, anxiety about Miss Siddal and constant visits to her in the country.

But Rossetti was never a quick worker, and when his parents were uneasy once at his slow rate of progress, he whimsically replied, 'I shall never, I suppose, get over the weakness of making a thing as good as I can manage.' During these two years his triptych for Llandaff Cathedral fitfully progressed, and he brought to completion two important designs in pen and ink, the *Hamlet and Ophelia* and *The Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee*. The oil picture of this last, in many respects the most beautiful of all Rossetti's compositions, was well begun on a large canvas, but, like so many of his other paintings, was never finished. A small oil painting dating from this period is *Bocca Baciata*, of whose original Mr. Bell Scott tells an amusing story. 'He [Rossetti] met her in the Strand. She was cracking nuts with her teeth and throwing the shells about. Seeing Rossetti staring at her, she threw some at him. Delighted with this brilliant *naïveté*, he forthwith accosted her, and carried her off to sit to him for her portrait.' This reminiscence serves to remind us that Rossetti was by no means limited to two or three models for his female types—a fact very frequently lost sight of—and at the same time illustrates

( his delight in unconventionality. There is another story that once at a restaurant he seized and untied the hair of a country girl, to whose remonstrances Rossetti blandly replied, 'I wanted to see how it looked,' and such was the seduction of his manner that his victim not only forgave him the affront, but consented to give him sittings.

A more important oil painting, the *Salutatio Beatricis*, representing Dante meeting Beatrice in Florence and in the Garden of Eden, was painted towards the end of 1859 in a week on a door in the famous Red House, Upton, whither Morris, newly married, had just established himself. In the following year, 1860, Rossetti at last married Miss Siddal. They had now been engaged for quite ten years, and it has often been wondered why it was so long postponed. The explanation, of course, is partly the constantly failing state of Miss Siddal's health and partly Rossetti's temporary financial embarrassments at times when it might have been possible. In a letter to his mother, written from Hastings in April, just before the wedding, Rossetti says: 'Like all the important things I ever meant to do—to fulfil duty or secure happiness—this one has been deferred almost beyond possibility. I have hardly deserved that Lizzie should still consent to it, but she has done so, and I trust I may still have time to prove

859  
Morris 00  
860  
Rossetti 00  
1860  
Burne-Jones



THE SALUTATION OF BEATRICE IN TERRA



my thankfulness to her.' And in a letter to his brother at the same time he writes : ' Lizzie's health has been in such a broken and miserable state for the last few days as to render me more miserable than I can possibly say. . . . Yesterday, owing no doubt to the improvement in the weather, she has taken some slight things, such as beef-tea and jelly, without as yet bringing them up again. I have been inquiring as to a special licence, as there seems little prospect of her being able as yet to enter the cold church with safety, but I find this promises so much delay and expense as to be hardly possible. The ordinary licence we already have, and I still trust to God we may be enabled to use it. If not, I should have so much to grieve for, and, what is worse, so much to reproach myself with, that I do not know how it might end for me.'

Happily Rossetti's fears were not confirmed, and on May 23 he was married at St. Clement's Church, Hastings, and immediately after set off to Folkestone, to cross to Boulogne. There the young couple stayed some days, visiting Rossetti's old friends the Maenzas, and thence went on to Paris. By this time Rossetti had shed many of the prejudices of his early P.R.B. days, and, impulsive as ever, he now hails Veronese's *Marriage of Cana* as 'the greatest picture in the world beyond a doubt.' It seems an almost uncanny thing

Rossetti  
pro-Renik

1860

≠ early  
RRB-  
got hit

that, while at Paris on his honeymoon, he should have completed his drawing of '*How They Met Themselves*,' in which his own wife served as the model for the lady who swoons away as she meets the wraith of her lover and herself. In less than two years the fatal omen here depicted was fulfilled.

From Paris the bride and bridegroom returned to Rossetti's old quarters at 14 Chatham Place, soon afterwards enlarged by the addition of some rooms on the same floor in the adjoining house, to which access was given by breaking through the wall. Soon after this event Burne-Jones also married, so that the new coterie now consisted of four households—the Burne-Joneses, the Morrisès, the Madox Browns, and the Rossettis—the most frequent bachelor visitor being Mr. Swinburne.

The two years which followed were certainly the happiest, and not the least busy, in Rossetti's life. In 1860 was founded the decorative firm of 'Morris, Marshall, Falkner, and Co.,' which has had so profound and lasting an influence on the adornment of our homes, and though its success was almost wholly due to the generous enterprise and indefatigable energy of Morris, this last was—at the commencement, at any rate—greatly encouraged and urged forward by Rossetti. Other partners in the firm whose names, like Rossetti's, did

860  
+ couples =  
Burne Jones  
Morris  
Ford Madox Brown  
Rossetti



HOW THEY MET THEMSELVES



not appear were Ford Madox Brown, Burne-Jones, and Philip Webb the architect, and it is a curious coincidence that the number of the partners should have been the same as that of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood—seven. 'From the first,' says Mr. W. M. Rossetti, 'the firm turned out whatever any one wanted in the way of decorative material—architectural adjuncts, furniture tapestries, embroideries, stained glass, wall papers, and what not. The goods were first-rate, the art and the workmanship excellent, the prices high. No concession was made to individual tastes or want of taste, no question of abatement was entertained. You could have the things such as the firm chose that they should be, or you could do without them. . . . Light or boisterous chaff among themselves, and something very like dictatorial irony towards customers, were the methods by which this singular commercial firm was conducted, and was turned, after a longish period of uncertain probation, into a flourishing success.'

The actual work accomplished by Rossetti for the firm was not great in quantity, and consisted chiefly in designs for stained glass, seven for *The Parable of the Vineyard* and six of *St. George and the Dragon* being the most notable. He also designed two lights, *Adam and Eve in Paradise*, for St. Martin's, Scar-

1860

Morris

The Firm

7 partners

Morris

Fm B

Burne J

Philip

borough, and painted an *Annunciation* in oils for the pulpit of the same church.

In 1861 Rossetti's first book appeared, 'The Early Italian Poets,' that unrivalled series of translations which he made almost entirely between his eighteenth and twenty-second birthdays. Here again Ruskin stood his friend, for Messrs. Smith and Elder would not undertake the risk of publication till they had received from him an advance or guarantee of £100. Though generally acclaimed by those best qualified to judge as a unique triumph in translation and an intrinsically great poetic achievement, in 1869 only about 600 copies had been sold. Ruskin's guarantee had been cleared, and Rossetti received the princely balance of *nine pounds* as his reward. Now the book is an acknowledged classic and a prime favourite with the publishers of reprints.

It is important to note that the volume of 'The Early Italian Poets' contained an intimation that 'Dante at Verona, and other Poems' would shortly be printed, thus clearly showing that Rossetti was at that time thinking of publishing a volume of his original poems, though many and terrible things were to happen before these did actually appear.

Almost contemporaneously with 'The Early Italian Poets' appeared Mr. Swinburne's first volume, 'The

Queen Mother and Rosalind,' dedicated to Rossetti, and about the same time Morris's 'Defence of Guinevere' was published, with a similar dedication. Although these events were only indirectly connected with Rossetti, they help to throw a light on the peculiar eminence he now enjoyed. He was a painter whose pictures were not seen, for the exhibitions of the short-lived Hogarth Club, to which he contributed, were semi-private affairs; he was a poet whose original compositions were known only to his intimates, and to these in manuscript. He was commonly held to be the leader of the Pre-Raphaelite School of Painting; he was now recognised as the admitted chief of a new group of young poets. The public were continually hearing of him, though they could neither see nor read his works, and this tended to heighten their curiosity about him, and make him even to them the romantic figure he will always remain. A twofold *chef d'école*, whose reputation was built up largely on hearsay from the few privileged with his friendship, Rossetti occupied at this time a position that has no parallel, unless we make an exception for that enjoyed for a time in Paris by Mallarmé, a lesser genius but another fascinating personality.

Meanwhile Rossetti continued to give instruction at the Working Men's College, and in the 'Memorials

of Edward Burne-Jones' an amusing and instructive incident there is related on the authority of Mr. J. P. Elmslie, a student and later pupil-teacher in the class. 'He says that Ruskin used to keep his pupils a long time drawing in black and white before he would allow them to begin colour, as he considered one great fault of modern art was that men began colour before they properly understood light and shade. However, to accustom his pupils to the use of the brush, he allowed them to make studies in Prussian blue. Rossetti, who was for having everybody to learn colour fully from the first,<sup>1</sup> was filled with indignation when, walking round Mr. Ruskin's class-room one evening, he saw the system that was practised there. "How's this?" he said, "nothing but blue studies; can't any of you see any colour but blue?" "It was by Mr. Ruskin's direction," one of the students answered. "Well, where do you get all this Prussian blue from?" asked Gabriel, going straight to the root of the matter; and being directed to a cupboard in the room, he opened it and refreshed his indignation by the sight of the store which he saw there. "Well, I declare!" he exclaimed, "here's a packet with several dozen cakes of this fearful colour. Oh, I can't allow it; Mr.

<sup>1</sup> Indubitably Rossetti was right, since in painting light and shade *is* a question of colour.

Ruskin will spoil everybody's eye for colour ; I shall confiscate the whole lot ; I must do it in the interests of his and my pupils. You must tell him that I've taken them all away." When, a few evenings later, Mr. Ruskin found that his dear Prussian blues were all gone, he inquired the cause, and being told, burst into one of those boisterous laughs in which he indulged whenever anything very much amused him.'

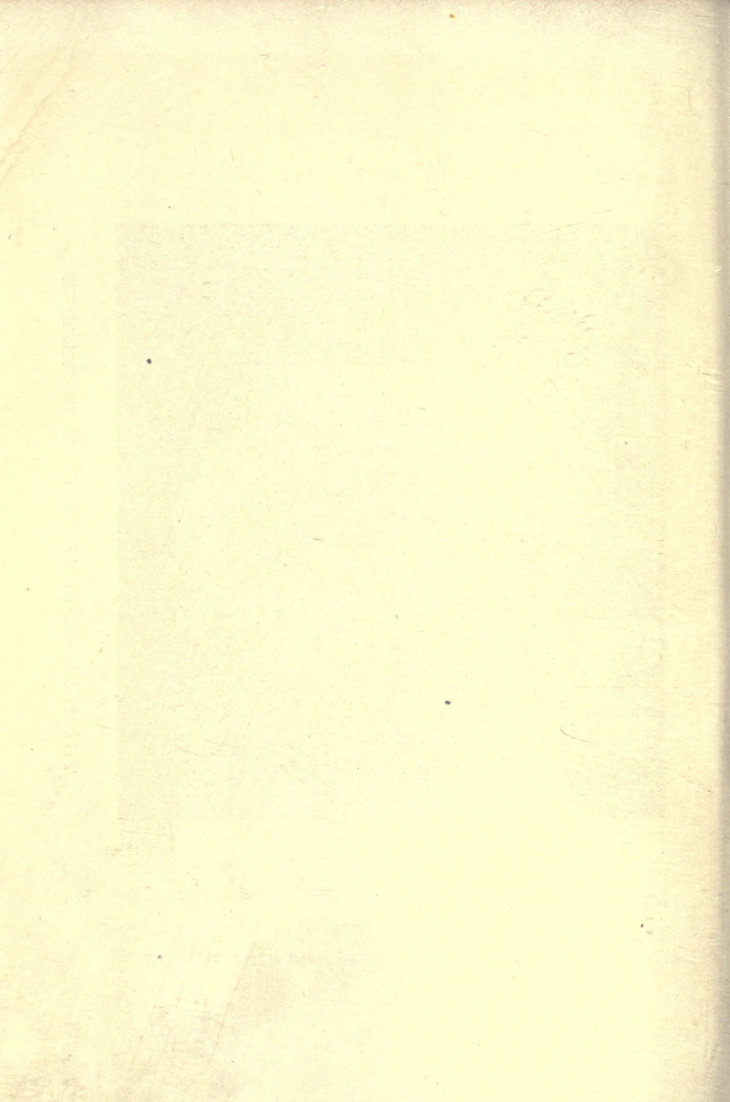
The same writer (Lady Burne-Jones) gives a very beautiful description of Mrs. D. G. Rossetti, as she appeared when the Burne-Joneses visited them at Hampstead, where the Rossettis had taken rooms for the sake of the purer air. 'I see her,' she writes, 'in the little upstairs bedroom, with its lattice window, to which she carried me when we arrived, and the mass of her beautiful deep-red hair as she took off her bonnet : she wore her hair very loosely fastened up, so that it fell in soft, heavy wings. Her complexion looked as if a rose tint lay beneath the white skin, producing a most soft and delicate pink for the darkest flesh-tones. Her eyes were of a kind of golden brown—agate colour is the only word I can think of to describe them—and wonderfully luminous : in all Gabriel's drawings of her, and in the type she created in his mind, this is to be seen. The eyelids were deep, but without any langour or drowsiness, and had the peculi-

arity of seeming scarcely to veil the light in her eyes when she was looking down.'

Throughout her short married life Mrs. Rossetti was never free from sickness, though her state was never so alarming as just before her marriage. On May 2, 1861, she was delivered of a stillborn female child, but she appears to have made a tolerably rapid and satisfactory recovery from her confinement. But, in addition to the phthisis, she suffered terribly from acute neuralgia, for which she was continually obliged to have recourse to laudanum or some other opiate, and this habit led the way to the final tragedy. On February 10, 1862, Mr. and Mrs. Rossetti and Mr. Swinburne dined together at the Sablonière Restaurant in Leicester Square, after which Mrs. Rossetti, who appeared as well as usual, returned home with her husband. Dante Gabriel saw her to bed, and then went out to his class at the Working Men's College. He returned home some time after eleven and found his wife insensible, and on the table at her bedside an empty phial which had contained laudanum. Four doctors were called in, but in spite of their endeavours she never recovered consciousness, and died about half-past seven in the morning. These are the facts, according to the best authorities, of a fatality which has given rise to so much discussion and unfounded surmise. There is not



THE SALUTATION OF BEATRICE IN PARADISE



a shred of evidence to suggest that Mrs. Rossetti ever had a thought of self-destruction, or that her husband had anything with which justly to reproach himself. All reports tending towards such conclusions are the baseless fabrications of mean and malignant minds.

An inquest, of course, was inevitable, and after hearing medical evidence and the testimony of the husband, Mr. Swinburne, and Mrs. Birrell, the house-keeper, the jury returned a verdict of 'Accidental Death.'

Rossetti was prostrated with grief, and, with the exception of Brown, appears to have been unable to see any one outside the family. Even to Ruskin he denied himself, and it is a touching tribute to the depth of his friendship for Ford Madox Brown that it was to this great-hearted man alone that Rossetti went for sympathy during the agony of the fatal night.

On the day of the funeral Rossetti put the manuscript book of his poems in his wife's coffin, and since so many exaggerated accounts of this painful incident have been rumoured about, it seems advisable to quote the clear and authoritative account of the affair given by Mr. W. M. Rossetti :—'There were some friends assembled in one of the rooms in Chatham Place ; the coffin, not yet close-shut, was in another. My brother, unwitnessed, deposited the MS. in the coffin. He then

joined his friends and informed Madox Brown of what he had done, saying, "I have often been writing at those poems when Lizzie was ill and suffering, and I might have been attending to her, and now they shall go." Brown disapproved of such a sacrifice to a mere impulse of grief or of self-reproach, and he appealed to me to remonstrate. I replied, "Well, the feeling does him honour, and let him do as he likes."

Here Mr. W. M. Rossetti was as clearly in the wrong as Brown was in the right, in principle if not in method. It was no use arguing with a man in Rossetti's state of mind, though any person of sense could be certain that he would later regret abandoning himself to an unthinking and semi-dramatic impulse. The kindest thing would have been to have abstracted the book from the coffin just before it was closed down, and kept the matter secret from Rossetti till the desire for publication grew again. There are times when deception is the truest act of friendship, and since no copy existed, and there was no time to make one, this was an occasion when it would have been permissible, and even praiseworthy.

## V

### LATER YEARS

ABOUT six months before the death of his wife, Rossetti had been greatly shocked to hear of the sudden death from scarlet fever of his friend, Alexander Gilchrist, author of the 'Life of Blake,' and to Mrs. Gilchrist is addressed one of the very few existing letters written by Rossetti immediately after and referring to his wife's death. No doubt there was a similarity in their sorrowful positions which made him more expansive to Mrs. Gilchrist than to others. In the course of this letter Rossetti says: 'I have now to be thankful for obligations connected with my work which were a source of anxiety before; for without them it seems to me that I could never work again. But I already begin to find the inactive moments the most unbearable, and must hope for the power, as I feel most surely the necessity, of working steadily without delay.'

The 'obligations' to which Rossetti here refers

were pictures paid for, but not delivered to his patron, Mr. Plint, who died in 1860. As something over £700 had been advanced on three pictures, Mr. Plint's executors began to press for delivery, and Rossetti, who had completed none, and some perhaps had scarcely commenced, was placed in an embarrassing position. It was during negotiations about these that he came into collision with Mr. Gambart, the picture-dealer, whom he pilloried in the following neat 'limerick':—

There is an old he-wolf named Gambart,  
 Beware of him if thou a lamb art.  
     Else thy tail and thy toes  
     And thine innocent nose  
 Will be ground by the grinders of Gambart.

In passing, it may be noted that a penchant for making nonsense verses on his friends was, like love of slang, a decided characteristic of Rossetti. As a further example of his powers in this diversion may be cited the amusing lines on his wife:—

There is a poor creature named Lizzie,  
 Whose pictures are dear at a tizzy;  
     And of this the great proof  
     Is that all stand aloof  
 From paying that sum unto Lizzie.

The botheration over Mr. Plint's pictures continued for some time, owing to Rossetti's inability to complete the works commissioned; but eventually the matter was compounded by the executors consenting to take other finished works in their stead. These, with the remainder of Mr. Plint's collection, were sold by auction in 1865, when they fetched prices much lower than those given to the artist, a circumstance which made Rossetti for the rest of his life endeavour as much as possible to prevent any of his works from coming into the sale-room.

Immediately after his wife's funeral, Rossetti left the house which had been so long his home, which he now no longer could bear to inhabit. At first he stayed with the other members of his family, then living in Albany Street, and afterwards took temporary chambers on the first floor of 59 Lincoln's Inn Fields. He had some idea of inducing the Rossetti family to leave Albany Street for Chelsea and living with them there; but though he soon found a house to his liking at 16 Cheyne Walk, this plan was abandoned and another carried into execution, whereby Mr. Swinburne and Mr. George Meredith became his sub-tenants, each having their own private sitting-rooms as well as sleeping apartments. Rossetti had been familiar with Mr. Meredith for some time, though he was

never so intimate with the great novelist as he was with Mr. Swinburne. Mr. W. M. Rossetti had also a bedroom in the house, and the quartet moved into their joint home in October, 1862. This menage lasted till 1864, when Mr. Meredith left, Swinburne staying on for some few years longer.

In this house Rossetti remained to the end of his life, and here, incited by Mr. Whistler—whose acquaintance he made while at Lincoln's Inn Fields—he began to form his celebrated collection of blue and white china. The house was also remarkable for the small menagerie kept within or in the garden at the back. Rossetti was not, like most people, content with dogs or cats—for these, indeed, he does not appear to have had any great liking, though he kept for a time a pomeranian and a deerhound. His pets were far more uncommon. Wombats were the objects of his chief affection, and other favourites were marmots, armadillos, peacocks, hedgehogs, wallabies, kangaroos, chameleons, green lizards, and Japanese salamanders.

It is a noteworthy fact that whereas Rossetti's finest poems were, almost without exception, written in his youth, his best pictures were nearly all painted after his wife's death. The first six years at Tudor House, as his Chelsea home was called, were fruitful in fine works. Here he successfully painted Joan of Arc,

Rossetti's paintings

after 186



VENUS VERTICORDIA



*Helen of Troy, Beata Beatrix, The Beloved (or The Bride)*—held by many to be his masterpiece—*Lady Lilith, Venus Verticordia*—painted from a wonderfully handsome cook whom he met in the street!—*The Blue Bower, Sibylla Palmifera, Monna Vanna*, and the well-known *Portrait of Mrs. William Morris*, now lent by the sitter to the Tate Gallery. All these were in oil, and among the water-colours of this period were the best version of the *Paolo and Francesca* triptych, *Monna Pomona, The Return of Tibullus to Delia*, and *Tristram and Yseult drinking the Love-potion*.

When his beautiful wife died, Rossetti, we may believe, found some slight consolation in the thought that this loss of the beloved one drew him still nearer to Dante. The analogy was now complete : Gabriel was Dante in Purgatory, while his wife was Beatrice in heaven ; and his public confession of this faith is his strangely beautiful *Beata Beatrix*, given by Lady Mount-Temple to the nation. Rossetti’s own explanation of his intentions is so complete, that no apology is needed for quoting his description of the work. ‘The picture,’ he wrote, ‘illustrates the *Vita Nuova* embodying symbolically the death of Beatrice as treated in that work. The picture is not intended at all to represent death, but to render it under the semblance of a trance, in which Beatrice,

paint

seated at a balcony overlooking the city, is suddenly rapt from earth to heaven. You will remember how Dante dwells on the desolation of the city in connexion with the incident of her death, and for this reason I have introduced it as my background, and made the figures of Dante and Love passing through the street and gazing ominously on one another, conscious of the event; while the bird, a messenger of death, drops a poppy between the hands of Beatrice. She, through her shut lids, is conscious of a new world, as expressed in the last words of the *Vita Nuova*—‘That blessed Beatrice who now gazeth continually on his countenance, *qui est per omnia sæcula benedictus.*’

Severe as the blow undoubtedly was, it is incorrect to suppose that Rossetti was plunged into unrelieved gloom after his wife’s death. He was not so weak in character or so devoid of interests in life as to give way to futile moping over the past. Speaking of the family and friendly parties which used to assemble at Tudor House, his sister Christina, in a magazine article published after her brother’s death, wrote: ‘Gloom and eccentricity, such as have been alleged, were, at any rate, not the sole characteristics of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. When he chose he became the sunshine of his circle, and he frequently chose so to be. His ready wit and fun amused us;

his good-nature and kindness of heart endeared him to us.'

At the same time it must be admitted that his dead wife was very constantly in his thoughts, and about 1864-5 Rossetti began to interest himself in spiritualism, in the hope that he might be enabled by its means to communicate with his lost one. His life at this time, if not exactly normal—and what man of genius is normal?—was hardly eccentric, if not actively happy. He was at least cheerful and as content as an artist may be. His worldly circumstances prospered, his professional earnings mounted into four figures, the average towards the end of the sixties being between two and three thousand a year. And up to the autumn of 1866, when he was thirty-eight years of age, his health remained good. But that year he became subject to a troublesome, if not dangerous, complaint, which occasionally required surgical treatment, and in the following year he began to suffer from insomnia. To speculate how this arose is idle. It is a trouble to which all highly strung, nervous temperaments are liable, a foe producing fearful results when it fastens and feeds upon an active imagination. About the same time—the summer of 1867—Rossetti's eyes became painful, and remembering his father's partial blindness, he feared he

might lose his sight. The specialists whom he consulted assured him that his eyes were not organically injured, only weakened by nervous overstrain; but this verdict, though hopeful, was far from reassuring to a man of Rossetti's impatient temperament. He took to wearing strong glasses, which he never afterwards abandoned, but still found his failing vision impeding his painting work, and the rest prescribed him was not easily won by a person of his restless energy.

In September, 1868, after a short tour in Warwickshire with his assistant, Mr. Dunn, Rossetti paid his first visit to Penkill Castle, in Ayrshire, the home of Miss Boyd, an intimate friend of William Bell Scott. Here his sleeping improved, though not his eyesight, for on returning to London in November, 1868, he found himself unable to paint before the beginning of November. The difficulty he was now experiencing in painting led Rossetti to think of his other gift of poetry, and he began to make some preparation for publishing a volume of poems. He collected and revised all the original poems and sonnets which had appeared in 'The Germ' and other periodicals, and endeavoured to remember and complete the lost poems which lay buried with his wife in Highgate Cemetery.

In the summer of 1869 he paid a second visit to Penkill, and here his conduct for the first time roused fears as to his mental condition. He is said to have discussed the ethics of suicide, and William Bell Scott, who was at Penkill at the time, tells a curious story of a walk to a romantic ravine called the Lady's Glen, where a hill-stream falls into a black and unfathomed pool. Rossetti bent fascinated over the dark water, and, as Mr. Bell Scott believed, had a strong impulse towards self-destruction, from which he only with an effort recovered. About the same time Rossetti believed himself to be in receipt of spiritual communications from his wife, and on one occasion he brought home a chaffinch, picked up in the road, which he supposed to be the spirit of his wife.

Inasmuch as these incidents are related only on the authority of Mr. Bell Scott—whose reminiscences, written long after the event, are not always reliable and often to be taken *cum grano salis*—it would not, perhaps, be advisable to attach too great weight to them. And if Rossetti's conduct was disturbing, it must be admitted that he proved himself to be in other respects intellectually vigorous, for it was during this visit to Penkill that he wrote the ballad of 'Troy Town,' and began 'The Stream's Secret'

and 'Eden Bower.' Moreover, his family letters during this period do not show any traces of mental disturbance, but they do reveal the fact that Rossetti's whole energy was now concentrated on his poetry, and that he was troubled, if not actually fretted, by his inability to recall by memory portions of the lost poems. Of many of his early poems, 'Jenny' among them, no copy existed save that in his wife's grave, and painful though the idea of their recovery must have been to him, Rossetti was at last brought to realise the wisdom of undoing his impulsive sacrifice.

Of his intentions he said nothing to his family till after the event, but on October 13, 1869, he wrote an account of the matter to his brother William. 'Various friends,' he says, 'have long hinted from time to time at the possibility of recovering my lost MSS., and when I was in Scotland last year Scott particularly referred to it. Some months ago Howell of his own accord entered on the matter, and offered to take all the execution of it on himself. This for some time I still hung back from accepting; but eventually I yielded, and the thing was done, after some obstacles, on Wednesday or Thursday last, I forget which. An order had first to be obtained from the Home Secretary, who strangely enough is



HAMLET AND OPHELIA



an old and rather intimate acquaintance of my own—H. A. Bruce. . . . All in the coffin was found quite perfect; but the book, though not in any way destroyed, is soaked through and through, and had to be still further saturated with disinfectants. It is now in the hands of the medical man who was associated with Howell in the disinterment, and who is carefully drying it leaf by leaf. There seems reason to fear that some minor portion is obliterated, but I must hope this may not prove to be the most important part. I shall not, I believe, be able to see it for at least a week yet.'

Although the opening of the grave was conducted at night and with all possible privacy, some rumour of it getting about excited gossip, and at the time and since Rossetti has been blamed for violating the secrecy of the grave to fulfil his literary ambition. Empty talk of this kind can never be wholly silenced, though the self-evident justification of his proceeding is that it hurt no one and made the world his debtor. We must all deplore the original act of morbid sacrifice, but unless we are prepared to maintain that it is right for a man to bury the talent with which God has endowed him, we cannot escape the accusation of being ourselves a little morbid if we denounce with horror its exhumation.

Having at last recovered the exact form of his old poems, Rossetti actively pushed forward their preparation for the press. Messrs. Blackwood made him an offer as to their publication, but eventually an arrangement was come to whereby Mr. F. S. Ellis became the publisher. Previous to their publication, however, Rossetti took certain steps which must unhesitatingly be condemned. An entry in Mr. W. M. Rossetti's diary for October 11, 1869, states: 'Gabriel called, and talked about his intended publication of poems in the Spring. He thinks it desirable to make sure of the reviewers as far as possible, and thinks he can count upon handsome notices in various reviews. His plan, therefore, would be to send the book first to two or three papers that he can count on, and that are of leading importance; wait for the appearance of the critiques in these; and only then send the book to other papers, which it would reach having already a considerable prestige about it. This is skilful scheming; but for my own part (as I told Gabriel) I would not diplomatise at all, but just leave the book to take its chance, and feel pretty confident of the result into the bargain.'

It is to be regretted that Rossetti did not listen to his brother and refrain from proceedings as unnecessary as they were ill-advised, for this attempt at what we

should now term 'log-rolling' was the surest way to excite that hostile feeling which it was the author's aim to avoid. When the poems were at length published in 1870 they evoked a chorus of praise which certainly cannot be wholly attributed to Rossetti's doubtful diplomacy or the enthusiasm of a few personal friends. At the same time, it cannot be doubted that an influential lead was given by Mr. Swinburne's eloquent panegyric on the volume in the 'Fortnightly Review,' by the article of William Morris in 'The Academy,' and the reviews of such friends as Mr. Joseph Knight and Mr. Sidney Colvin which appeared in other journals.

The poems published, Rossetti returned to his painting, though his eyes still gave him trouble and his general health was far from satisfactory. He had now definitely taken to the use of chloral to relieve his insomnia, and since he disliked the taste of this drug it became his habit to take in immediate sequence a wineglass of neat whisky. That this combination must eventually have injurious results on his health Rossetti could not have been wholly unaware from the first, but in his complicated situation Rossetti thought he was choosing the lesser of two evils. 'The fact is,' he once wrote to Madox Brown, 'that any man in my case must either do as I do, or cease from

necessary occupation, which cannot be pursued in the day when the night is stripped of its rest.'

To whatever extent this habitual and increasing consumption of chloral may have deranged his nervous system, to whatever delusions it may subsequently have given rise, its immediate effect was to restore to Rossetti his powers as a painter. It enabled him within the next two years or so to paint his largest and, as some think, his greatest picture, *Dante's Dream*, now at the Walker Art Gallery of Liverpool, to paint a duplicate of *Beata Beatrix*, *Pandora*, *Mariana*, *Veronica Veronese*, and *Water-willow*. Into the background of this last picture Rossetti introduced the famous Manor House at Kelmscott, in Oxfordshire, of which he became joint-tenant with William Morris in May, 1871. Five months later appeared the first sign of that professional hostility which Rossetti had studiously endeavoured to evade.

In the 'Contemporary Review' for October, 1871, appeared an article entitled 'The Fleshly School of Poetry,' signed Thomas Maitland, but written in fact by the late Mr. Robert Buchanan, in which Rossetti's poems were vehemently attacked on moral as well as literary grounds. Notwithstanding the writer's exaggerated overstatement of his case, his excessive intemperance, and his indiscriminate denunciation, his



DANTE'S DREAM



criticism contained some particles of truth, and since it was undoubtedly prompted by sincere motives and was productive of lasting results, it requires to be considered in some detail. The pseudonymous method of attack has been generally and rightly condemned. Buchanan himself maintained that he desired the article to be published anonymously, and that it was the editor who appended the pseudonym; but however modest a writer may be—and Buchanan was not of a retiring nature—he is never more bound in duty to declare himself than when he makes a personal attack.

It is the more disgraceful to Buchanan that he withheld his true signature because he wished to introduce himself into the discussion, to exalt his own poetical productions, and to accuse Rossetti of imitating one of his own ‘quasi-lyrical poems.’ Buchanan was a Scottish poet and novelist of some talent and greater conceit. He was a disappointed man, and as far apart from Rossetti in temperament as the north is from the south. He appears to have been as genuinely shocked by some of the more passionate outbursts of Rossetti as a Puritan might have been at the love-carols of a Cavalier, and his indignation was stirred to fiercer wrath by the praises which Morris and Swinburne had lavished on Rossetti. It is not difficult to realise that Buchanan conscientiously thought himself called upon

to unmask the 'log-rolling' of this trio, whom he likens to three minor characters in 'Hamlet,' who 'finding it impossible to risk an individual bid for the leading business, have arranged all to play leading business together, and mutually to praise, extol, and imitate each other; and although by these measures they have fairly earned for themselves the title of the Mutual Admiration School, they have in a great measure succeeded in their object—to the general stupefaction of a British audience.' Here we have the natural reaction to Rossetti's ill-advised diplomacy.

Buchanan next proceeds to the more serious impeachment of Rossetti for animalism, the shameless chronicling of amorous sensations, and cites against him the sonnet on 'Nuptial Sleep':—

At length their long kiss severed with sweet smart;  
 And as the last slow sudden drops are shed  
 From sparkling eaves when all the storm has fled,  
 So singly flagged the pulses of each heart.  
 Their bosoms sundered, with the opening start  
 Of married flowers to either side outspread  
 From the knit stem; yet still their mouths, burnt red,  
 Fawned on each other where they lay apart. . . .

It would be more pertinent, perhaps, to condemn the excessive use of sibilants in this sonnet; but unjust

as it is to label these lines as 'shameless' and 'sickening,' it is true that their voluptuousness is distasteful to many readers whose minds are steadied by the cooler blood of the north. It is not always easy to say where sensuousness ends and sensuality begins, and Rossetti at times hovers on the border line. To most British readers there is an ugly sound in lovers 'fawning on each other,' 'munching necks with kisses,' 'gripping and lipping limbs,' and the occurrence in these poems of such suspicious phrases lent colour to Buchanan's accusation.

At first Rossetti does not appear to have been seriously concerned at this attack, and he even appreciated as a good joke against himself some lines in which Buchanan neatly parodied his fondness for accenting weak endings :—

When winds do roar, and rains do pour,  
Hard is the life of the sailor ;  
He scarcely as he reels can tell  
The side-lights from the binnacle ;  
He looketh on the wild water, etc.

To the more serious accusations brought against him, Rossetti wrote a temperate reply, entitled 'The Stealthy School of Criticism,' which appeared in the 'Athenæum' over his signature. But this reply only rekindled Buchanan's ire, and early in 1872 he repub-

lished as a pamphlet his attack, now extended and more violently denunciatory than before, and bearing his rightful signature. After Rossetti's death, Buchanan confessed his injustice when he 'impugned the purity and misconceived the passion of writings too hurriedly read'; and before that he had made some amends by dedicating to Rossetti as 'To an Old Enemy,' his dramatic novel 'God and the Man,' in the lines :—

I would have snatch'd a bay leaf from thy brow,  
 Wronging the chaplet on an honour'd head ;  
 In peace and charity I bring thee *now*  
 A lily-flower instead.  
 Pure as thy purpose, blameless as thy song,  
 Sweet as thy spirit, may this offering be ;  
 Forget the bitter blame that did thee wrong,  
 And take the gift from me !

But the evil was done and irreparable. Predisposed to melancholy and suspicion by continual chloral dosing, Rossetti viewed this repeated attack as the sign of a widespread conspiracy to hound him out of society, and from this delusion he never afterwards recovered. Old friends were suspected of hostility and innocent pleasantry interpreted as studied insult. The closing lines of 'Fifine at the Fair' were construed into a veiled attack, and Browning was expunged from the list of

his friends; Lewis Carroll's 'Hunting of the Snark' was conceived by his deluded brain to be a satire on himself. At last his brother, calling on him at 16 Cheyne Walk, on June 2, 1872, found that Rossetti was 'past question, not entirely sane.' On this day Rossetti completed the sale of *The Bower Meadow* for £735, and when Mr. Lefèvre called for the picture, the artist, in a high state of nervous excitement, suggested that if he did not consider it good value for the money the agreement might still be cancelled. When Dr. Maudsley was called in, Rossetti, according to his brother, 'even went so far as to say that he was probably no doctor, but some one foisted upon himself for a sinister purpose.' Other medical men were consulted, and it was agreed that complete cessation from all work and excitement was imperative, and since change and care were equally desirable, on the Friday (June 7) Rossetti was induced to leave Cheyne Walk and stay with his friend, Dr. Gordon Hake, at Roehampton. His mental state gave cause for great uneasiness; a number of gipsy vans seen on the Saturday was viewed by Rossetti as a disparaging demonstration, and he imagined he heard mysterious voices insulting him. This last delusion became so unbearable, that on the Saturday night he swallowed the contents of a bottle of laudanum which he had

contrived to bring with him and hide from his friends. For hours Rossetti's life was despaired of, but, thanks to the indefatigable efforts of Dr. Hake and Mr. Marshall, he regained consciousness on the Monday.

After this there was some talk of sending him to a private asylum, but Madox Brown generously interfered, offering to take charge of his friend, and after a week or so at Brown's house, Rossetti rallied sufficiently to be able to go to Scotland to recruit. By September Rossetti had so far recovered as to commence painting again, and at this time he finished a duplicate of *Beata Beatrix* for his patron, Mr. Graham, who had placed at Rossetti's disposal his two houses in Perthshire, and towards the end of the month he left Scotland to join the Morrisises at Kelmscott, where he stayed till July, 1874.

The charm of this secluded manor house and the beneficial effects of country air and quiet is indicated in several of the family letters he indited thence. In one to his aunt Rossetti calls Kelmscott 'as good and genuine a specimen of old middle-class architecture as could be found anywhere. I suppose its aspect is absolutely Elizabethan in every respect, but it is probably a century later.' In another to his uncle he says : 'The garden and meadows leading to the river-brink are truly delicious—indeed, the place is perfect ;



HEAD OF THE BLESSED DAMOZEL



and the riverside walks are most charming in their way, though I must say the flatness of the country renders it monotonous and uninspiring to me. However, it is the very essence of all that is peaceful and retired—the solitude almost absolute. Kelmscott is a hamlet containing, I am told, 117 people, and these even one may be said never to see, if one keeps, as I do, the field-paths rather than the high road. I am in Oxfordshire here, it seems, though Lechlade (2½ miles hence) is in Gloucestershire.' Again, to his brother he writes: 'My strength seems completely re-established here to-day. The floods are not out as yet, so that walking is feasible, and the weather is splendid. The place is a perfect paradise.'

During his two years' stay at Kelmscott Rossetti fully recovered his painting powers, and among the works produced during this period were *La Ghirlandata*, *Proserpine*, *The Bower Maiden*, *The Roman Widow*, *The Blessed Damsel*, and a smaller version of *Dante's Dream*. Unwilling to break his seclusion by going to London or receive new patrons, Rossetti now employed Mr. Charles Augustus Howell to act as his agent and look after the disposal of his works, and this arrangement, while not proving unprofitable to Rossetti, was certainly remunerative in devious ways to Mr. Howell.

Although this business arrangement was eventually

North London

broken off in 1876, Rossetti never quarrelled with his agent or suspected him of being connected in any way with the forged Rossetti drawings which about this time came into the market.

A forgery of another kind—that of his signature to a cheque for £50—troubled Rossetti at the beginning of his stay at Kelmscott. The culprit was soon detected—a woman—but as Rossetti had known her from childhood he did not wish to prosecute, while at the same time he wished to guard against a repetition of the offence. This delicate matter was satisfactorily adjusted by the kindly offices of a young solicitor, Mr. Theodore Watts, now known as Mr. Watts-Dunton, the author of ‘Aylwin’;<sup>1</sup> and so the unfortunate affair led to Rossetti’s intimacy with that gifted and great-hearted man, whose unselfish and untiring friendship did so much to cheer the last sad years of his life.

While his rapid recovery from an almost fatal breakdown showed the astonishing recuperative powers of Rossetti’s physique, his life at Kelmscott was far from healthy and regular. He continued to dose himself with chloral and alcohol before going to bed, whither he rarely retired till between three and five in

<sup>1</sup> It is an open secret that the character of Darcy in this romance is largely drawn from Rossetti.

the morning, while his habitual dinner hour was 10 p.m. Nor was he entirely free from delusions, one of which resulted in his leaving Kelmscott and returning to London. While walking by the riverside Rossetti imagined he was insulted by a party of anglers, and turned upon them in a violent abusive fashion. Mr. George Hake, who was now acting as his secretary and companion, got Rossetti away from them and did his best to make some explanation, but this strange outburst naturally excited comment and marred the rural peace of Kelmscott.

Accordingly soon after this affair, towards the end of July, 1874, Rossetti, now in his forty-seventh year, returned to Cheyne Walk, where he practically shut himself up in his house. Late in the evening he would have a cab brought to the door, get in with Hake or another companion, and be driven to Regent's Park or some other airy spot. There he would get out and take a good walk and return to the cab to be driven home again. If this conduct verged upon the eccentric, Rossetti later gave still more unmistakable signs of mental disturbance. It so happened that the house next to his own was occupied by Mr. Malcolm Lawson, a brother of the gifted landscape painter, Cecil Lawson. For some reason, or rather for no reason whatever, Rossetti imagined that this Mr. Lawson, who

was a musician, disliked him and wilfully annoyed him by making a 'large and frequent amount of unnecessary noise.' 'I remember,' says Mr. W. M. Rossetti, 'there was once a thrush hard by, which, to my hearing, simply trilled its own lay on and off. My brother discerned a different note, and conceived that the thrush had been trained to ejaculate something insulting to him.'

To guard against these supposed insults Rossetti had the walls of his studio made sound-proof, and during these alterations, in August, 1876, he paid a visit to Lord and Lady Mount Temple, at Broadlands, in Hampshire, where his spirits improved, though he continued to have restless nights and was in some physical disquiet. Misfortune now seemed to dog Rossetti's footsteps, for in the following year, in addition to his nervous and mental distress, he was struck down by that internal trouble to which allusion has already been made. An operation was necessary, which though successful greatly weakened the patient. For two months he was unable to move, but as soon as he was able to travel, Rossetti was taken by Madox Brown to Hunter's Forestall, near Herne Bay, where he was joined by his mother and sister and Mr. Watts-Dunton. For long he was incapable of doing any work, and it was feared that he would never be able to



BEATA BEATRIX



paint again, but with fine weather in October he rallied wonderfully, and in November, nearly five months after the operation, he was able to return to town and commence work again. It was probably soon after his return that Rossetti finished his *Venus Astarte*—also known as *Astarte Syriaca*—upon which he had been working since 1875, a picture the painter himself considered to be nearly if not quite his best work. Of all his works this was his greatest money-success, Mr. Clarence Fry (of photographing fame) paying for its possession the high price of £2100. Other works which Rossetti completed within the next two or three years were *Mnemosyne*, *A Vision of Fiammetta*, *La Donna Della Finestra*, and *The Day-Dream*. The last, bequeathed by Mr. Constantine Ionides to the Victoria and Albert Museum, was a work with which Rossetti took especial pains, repainting the head after it had already been completed and working again over other parts of the canvas. Yet the painting does not show any evidence of being laboured, and is certainly to be reckoned one of his best, as it is the last picture of importance which he lived to finish. Mrs. William Morris was the model for this, as for most of the later works, with the exception of the *Vision of Fiammetta*, for which sat Mrs. Stillman, the sister of Miss Christina Spartali, Whistler's *Princess of the Porcelain Country*.

painting  
1876 f

In these last years of his life Rossetti seemed to recover something of the fiery energy of his youth, for in addition to his pictorial work he recommenced his poetical, writing 'The White Ship' in 1880 and completing 'The King's Tragedy' before the spring of 1881. This last year was one of special activity with Rossetti, both as painter and poet. He sold his large picture, *Dante's Dream* (for £1575), to the Walker Art Gallery at Liverpool; he produced 'Ballads and Sonnets,' a volume of new poems with the exception of certain portions of 'The House of Life,' and a reissue of his old volume entitled 'Poems,' which contained 'The Bride's Prelude' and other new matter. In addition to the paintings already mentioned, he was also working on *The Boat of Love*, left in monochrome, and the picture *Found*, which, though begun as far back as 1854, was never entirely finished. But these triumphs were dearly bought, and the achievements of 1881 were the expiring leap of the bright flame of his genius. Rossetti himself seems to have had some foreboding of the end, for, speaking of the strain of writing 'The King's Tragedy,' he remarked to Mr. Caine that it was 'as though my own life ebbed out with it.' It may here be remarked that it was only in 1880 that Mr. Hall Caine introduced himself to Rossetti, and

1880-1  
poetry

painting

not till July, 1881, that he took up his abode with Rossetti at Cheyne Walk ; so that the friendship, though intimate, was of exceedingly short duration.

By the autumn of 1881 Rossetti was completely exhausted, and the result of his excessive use of chloral began to declare itself not only in deep melancholy and painful dreams, but also in a numbness of the limbs which simulated the action of paralysis. Of his terrible state in the middle of December no words could be more eloquent than the brief memorandum of his physician given by Mr. W. M. Rossetti. Here is the record of a week, from December 16 to 22 :—

‘ Friday : four minims of morphia at 9 p.m. ; sleep four hours ; restless and craving for whisky and chloral till 3 a.m. ; 1½ oz. whisky at 5 a.m. Saturday : restless, but condition much better. At 9 p.m. five minims of morphia, dozing and sleep for one hour and quiet until 12 p.m. At 1 a.m. craving for whisky and chloral ; three minims of morphia. At 2 a.m. doze for a short time ; then restless, craving for whisky ; 2 oz. of whisky at 4 a.m. Sunday : horrible dreams ; restless until 9 a.m., then sleep for two hours ; delusions towards evening. Monday : 9 a.m., six minims of morphia ; quiet sleep till 12 ; 1 a.m., restless, violent and irritable ; delusions, etc. ; two minims of morphia. Restless, with delusions all day ; delusions,

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etc., night. Tuesday : four minims of morphia ; restless, no sleep, but quiet ; delusions. No chloral or whisky. Wednesday : ether and bromide ; quiet ; delusions ; no morphia ; sleep eight hours. Thursday : three minims of morphia at 9 p.m. ; sleep quiet ever since.'

Thanks to the assiduous attention of his physician, Mr. Maudsley, and the still unbeaten powers of his own constitution, Rossetti so far recovered that early in January he was able to leave his bed and even walk about without assistance, though his left arm continued for some time to be in a paralysed condition. By the end of the month he had made such progress that he was fit to travel, and on February 4, accompanied by Mr. Caine, Rossetti journeyed to Birchington-on-Sea, where his friend, Mr. John P. Seddon, had placed a bungalow at his disposal. Strengthened by the sea-air, Rossetti was able to take short walks soon after his arrival, and seemed at first to be mending satisfactorily. He was able to make a sketch or two and even to continue working on replicas of his *Proserpine* and *Joan of Arc*, while he also took up and completed his grotesque ballad of 'Jan Van Hunks,' relating that worthy's disastrous smoking duel with the devil. In March he was joined at Birchington by his mother—now in her eighty-second year—and his sister, Christina,

early in  
1862  
begun  
1862

while his brother William and Mr. Watts-Dunton made frequent periodical visits. Other visitors were Mr. William Sharp (the 'Fiona MacLeod' of the Celtic movement), Mr. Frederick Shields, and Mr. Leyland.

The improvement in Rossetti's condition, however, was more apparent than real. Early in March the medical man attending him discovered that kidney-disease had supervened, and after the middle of the month he was constantly confined to his bed. By the end of the month a relapse also occurred in his nervous and mental condition, and on April 2 the local physician, Dr. Harris, expressed an opinion that there was softening of the brain consequent upon the abuse of chloral. On the following Wednesday, April 5, his condition was pronounced very serious, though even that day his intellect was vigorous enough to enable him to dictate to Mr. Caine two sonnets upon his design *The Sphinx*. These two sonnets and the ballad of 'Jan Van Hunks' were given by Rossetti to Mr. Watts-Dunton and have never been published. On the Saturday, Mr. Marshall arrived from London, and after a consultation with Dr. Harris, the family was informed that all symptoms pointed to uræmia, or blood-poisoning from uric acid. The following day, Easter Sunday, the patient seemed to maintain his strength so well that

Mr. Marshall returned to London, and counselled Rossetti's removal to Chelsea, being of the opinion that Birchington was too cold for him. What followed that same evening, April 9, is best related as recorded in Mrs. Rossetti's diary. 'We had arranged to sit up, I till 10, William till 2, Christina last, when suddenly, just after nurse and Mr. Watts [Watts-Dunton] together had put a poultice on Gabriel's back (Mr. Watts had but just left the room, nurse was attending to the fire, I was by the bed, rubbing Gabriel's back), Gabriel, who was sitting, fell back, threw his arms out, screamed out loud two or three times close together, and then lay breathing but insensible. Nurse raised the alarm. Mr. Watts hurried back, and, one on each side, they held Gabriel down; but there was not the slightest struggle or return of consciousness. All assembled round the bed. Mr. Shields flew for Dr. Harris, and in the shortest time returned with him. Gabriel still breathed, but that was all. Dr. Harris once or twice said he still lived, and then said he was dead. This took place shortly after nine o'clock p.m. . . . The instant cause of death, assigned by Dr. Harris, was that the uræmic poison touched the brain.'

On the Friday following, when Rossetti was laid to rest in the churchyard by the sea, of the Pre-



LUCREZIA BORGIA



Raphaelite Brothers only two were present among the mourners—W. M. Rossetti and the faithful Stephens. Ford Madox Brown was away at Manchester ; Swinburne and Burne-Jones, though invited, were unable to attend ; Morris, apparently, was not even asked. Patrons were there, Leyland and Graham, loyal friends of a younger generation, Mr. Watts-Dunton, Mr. Shields, Mr. Hall Caine, but of the older men whose names are connected with Rossetti, almost the only representative was Judge Vernon Lushington, who has left a touching description of the scene in a letter to Mr. Bell Scott.

‘The church at Birchington,’ he writes, ‘stands back three-quarters of a mile from the sea, on slightly rising ground which looks over the open land and the sea. It is of grey country flint, built in the twelfth or thirteenth century, and restored a few years ago—I thought, simply. It is nicely kept, and to-day was full of Easter flowers. It has an old grey tower and grey shingle spire, which went up, as I noticed during the ceremony, into a pure blue sky. The churchyard is nicely kept too ; it was bright with irises and wall-flowers in bloom, and close to Gabriel’s grave there was a laurustinus and a lilac. The grave is on the south side, close to the porch. It was cut so clearly it seemed carved out of the chalk. Altogether it was a sweet spot, I thought.

‘At the graveside, wonderful to say, was the old mother, supported by William on one side and Christina on the other—a most pathetic sight. She was very calm, extraordinarily calm, but whether from self-command or the passivity of age I do not know, probably both, but she followed all the proceedings with close interest. Then around was a company of about fifteen or twenty; many of them friends of yours, and several whom I did not know. The service was well read by the Vicar. Then we all looked into the resting-place of our friend, and thought and felt our last farewells. Many flowers, azaleas and primroses, were thrown in. I saw William throw in his lily of the valley. This is all I have to tell you. Sad it was, very sad, but simple and full of feeling, and the fresh beauty of the day made itself felt with all the rest.’

## VI

### CRITICISM AND APPRECIATION

ON the gravestone over Rossetti's last resting-place at Birchington it is justly written that he was honoured 'among painters as a painter, and among poets as a poet'; and it is not altogether a paradox to say that he never ceased to be a poet in his paintings, a painter in his poems. In all his work his dual talent is interwoven to such an extent that it is almost true to say that he wrote like a painter and painted like a man of letters, for if in his poems the main appeal is made more to the eye than to the ear, so in his pictures he aims not merely at the eye but at the mind of the spectator. His governing principle is clearly enunciated in the letter to Mr. Hall Caine which contains the following famous passage :—'Conception, my boy, *fundamental brainwork*, that is what makes the difference in all art. Work your metal as much as you like, but first take care that it is gold and worth working. A Shakespearian sonnet is better than the most perfect in

Rossetti  
→ Caine

form, because Shakespeare wrote it.' Of the high value of conception, of its power to veil blemishes in expression, Rossetti early gave a conspicuous example in his picture of *The Annunciation*, but it would be a sad error to deduce from his dictum just quoted that form in art is a matter of mere secondary importance. Since the days of Plato and Aristotle critics have been divided as to whether the thought or the form is the most vital quality in a work of art, but all their discussions have left the problem still unsolved and only led to a general consensus of opinion that the highest art is the marriage of the most beautiful idea with the most perfect form. Consequently the principle laid down by Rossetti is little more than a half-truth, and it is curious that the very artist who thus awards the palm to the idea should be commonly regarded as the founder of the doctrine of 'Art for Art's sake.'

That doctrine is more properly associated with the name of Rossetti's greatest disciple, Mr. Algernon Swinburne, who in his essay on Hugo's 'L'Année Terrible' conclusively proves that it is right as an affirmative, wrong as a negative, that is to say, if the work done be not great and perfect enough to rank as an artistic triumph, the poem, picture, statue is a failure irredeemable and inexcusable by any show or any proof of high purpose and noble meaning.

Is Gedanken  
geist Br. auf  
in FF



ASTARTE SYRIACA



'The worth of a poem has properly nothing to do with its moral meaning or design; the praise of a Cæsar as sung by a Virgil, of a Stuart as sung by a Dryden, is preferable to the most magnanimous invective against tyranny, which love of country and of liberty could wring from a Bavius or a Settle.' On the other hand, Mr. Swinburne justly maintains that it is utterly wrong to deny that art of the highest kind may not ally itself with moral or religious passion, with the ethics or the politics of a nation or an age.

In the case of his own work, whether written or designed, this vexed question does not in reality arise, for Rossetti was not essentially concerned with ethics, politics, or religion. His art was animated by a pure æsthetic passion, the perception and revelation of the beautiful, but of a beauty—despite the accusation of 'fleshiness'—that was not merely physical, but still more intellectual and spiritual. There never was an artist who was less of a materialist than Rossetti, and no doubt had he been more material he would have been a greater craftsman. In his temperate reply to Buchanan's attack, Rossetti maintained that in his poems 'all the passionate and just delights of the body are declared—somewhat figuratively it is true, but unmistakably—to be as naught if not ennobled by the concurrence of the soul at all times.' And this creed,

*Swinburne*

*In his poem  
tale  
"Hand and  
Soul!"*

*X*

this sacramental significance of things physical, he crystallised in the lines—

*Quelle!*

Whose speech Truth knows not from her thought,  
Nor Love her body from her soul.

About few modern artists have there been more misconceptions than about Rossetti, who has been almost as indiscriminately praised by too zealous friends as he has been abused by critics blinded by hostility. Instead of patiently inquiring into the facts of his performance, the tendency has been either to swallow or reject him whole. For his friends there is much excuse in the fascination of his personality. 'I know not,' says that balanced critic, Mr. Theodore Watts-Dunton, 'what friend of Rossetti's can assume the judicial attitude when speaking of him.' 'He was full of an enthusiasm that speedily communicated itself to those around him. He had great conversational and even oratorical gifts. His voice was full and sweet, and his manner, when he chose, exceedingly attractive.' So a writer in the 'Standard' at the time of his decease—and who can wonder if the value of a poem was heightened in its reading by the possessor of these charms of voice and manner, so that the hearers were at times seduced into regarding as ornaments what in truth were only flaws in his art. To affirm that

flaws exist is not to detract from his lasting merits ; for Rossetti's fame does not rest on any one achievement, he has not won his abiding-place in English art and letters by any *single* painting or poem. It is not as the writer of this or that poem, as the painter of this or that picture, that he gained pre-eminence among so many highly gifted contemporaries. Rossetti is one of those rare artists whose personality is even greater than their work. Fate did not permit him to produce the perfect, flawless masterpiece : his genius was not concentrated in one mighty effort, and remains a radiant star-cluster rather than a glowing sun. And as viewed across a great space the shining points of the cluster melt and blend into a luminous mist, so time is teaching us to look for the supreme achievement of Rossetti not in the scattered fragments of his genius, but in the general temper of the whole. When all his poems are forgotten, when all his pictures are lost, Rossetti will still be remembered for his revival of Symbolism in art.

‘No one can understand his genius,’ Mr. Watts-Dunton has written, ‘who does not observe how, in his earliest pictures, a temper at once mystic and sensuous is struggling with those traditions of asceticism which were inseparable from early Christian art, and how gradually but irresistibly his own sensuous nature

asserted itself till asceticism at last was eliminated, while mysticism remained. . . . *To eliminate asceticism from romantic art, and yet to remain romantic, to retain that mysticism which alone can give life to romantic art, and yet to be as sensuous as the Titians who revived sensuousness at the sacrifice of mysticism, was the quest, more or less conscious, of Rossetti's genius.'*

It was this impulse towards ascetic mysticism which led Rossetti deliberately to introduce archaisms into his early poems and pictures, thus seeking to revive the spirit by a strict adherence to the letter, and exposing his art to the accusation of affectation when he was only aiming at simplicity. Happily he soon perceived the error of what he himself termed his 'absurd mediævalisms,' and his best work, in poetry at all events, was accomplished in that transitional period when he had discarded archaisms and his sensuous nature, kept well under control, had not yet seduced him into that excess of elaboration with which his later work tended to be overloaded. But though his work may thus roughly be classified into two distinct styles, it must be remembered that the struggle was ever present, and that some early works foreshadow his later style just as during his later ornateness there were reversions to the early simplicity. Traces of these alternations may be found in his pictorial work when we compare *The Magdalene*

*at the Door of Simon the Pharisee* of 1857 with *Veronica Veronese*, painted towards the end of the sixties; and they are still more marked in his poetical, as may be seen by contrasting the gorgeous 'Love's Nocturne' of 1859 with the ballads of 'The White Ship' and 'The King's Tragedy,' which occupied the last years of his life.

The restless stirrings of Rossetti's spirit, indicated by these fluctuations in manner, find a parallel expression in his alternations of media. So equal is the development of both that it is impossible to decide whether the natural bent of his genius was more poetical or pictorial; but signs are not wanting that poetry, begun as a recreation between intervals of painting, steadily strengthened its hold upon him as his life progressed. 'If any man has any poetry in him,' said Rossetti to Burne-Jones in 1857, 'he should paint, for it has all been said and written, and they have scarcely begun to paint it.' But with maturity he altered his opinion, and in 1871 he writes to Madox Brown: 'I wish one could live by writing poetry. I think I'd see painting d——d if I could.' But whatever doubts Rossetti may have had as to manners and media of expression—doubts which may possibly have contributed to impair his facility and fluency as an executant—he was wholly

free from any indecision as to the burden which these vehicles should convey. 'Throughout his life,' writes Mr. Watts-Dunton, 'he had taken an interest in only four subjects — poetry, painting, mediæval mysticism, and woman. . . . No poet and no painter has ever before him given so much attention to woman as Rossetti has done. With the exception of "The White Ship," a few of the reflective sonnets, and an occasional lyric such as "Cloud Confines," woman is the subject of all his poems, and the same may be said of his pictures.' This verdict is confirmed by a more recent critic, Mr. A. C. Benson, who justly observes: 'There is no English poet of the nineteenth century who has so little of the instinctive love of nature as Rossetti. . . . Nearly all his poems are the expression of some poignant passion; his tragedies are the tragedies of blighted or broken love, and the blind recklessness that follows upon it. His view of nature is a background, either of similarity or contrast, to the emotions which are being enacted in the foreground. Woods and hills are accessories: even in such poems as "The Stream's Secret," where the stream passes, as it were, through the forefront of the dream, it is charged with the message and tidings of far-off love. The voice of the beloved is heard within the ripple, and the murmur of the



THE LOVING CUP



water seems to be trying to convey to the listening brain some hint of passion.’

In view of the blow that fate had in store for him, there seems to be an almost prophetic foreboding in the young poet’s constant dwelling on the theme of parted lovers. It may be urged that Dante gave this turn to his early thoughts, but it was natural inclination that led Rossetti to choose from the pageant of the ‘Divine Comedy’ those incidents which appealed most strongly to his imagination. How many of Rossetti’s poems lamenting a lost beloved seem to have been written in the light of actual experience, and yet when we verify the dates we find they were written before his marriage. That beautiful poem, ‘The Portrait,’ in which a painter muses over the picture of his dead wife, would seem to belong to the period of the *Beata Beatrix* did we not know that it was written about the time of *The Blessed Damozel*—that is to say, when Rossetti was still under the age of manhood.

Next day the memories of these things,  
 Like leaves through which a bird has flown,  
 Still vibrated with Love’s warm wings ;  
 Till I must make them all my own  
 And paint this picture. So, ’twixt ease  
 Of talk and sweet long silences,

She stood among the plants in bloom  
 At windows of a summer room,  
 To feign the shadow of the trees.

And as I wrought, while all above  
 And all around was fragrant air,  
 In the sick burthen of my love  
 It seemed each sun-thrilled blossom there  
 Beat like a heart among the leaves.  
 O heart that never beats nor heaves,  
 In that one darkness lying still,  
 What now to thee my love's great will  
 Or the fine web the sunshine weaves ?

Equally characteristic of Rossetti are the picturesque imagery in these lines, the arresting epithet, 'sun-thrilled blossom,' and the rhyme of 'silences' with 'ease.' Mr. Benson pertinently suggests that 'Rossetti's ear gave weak endings a certain emphasis which a pure-bred Englishman would hardly affix to them,' and he reminds us that 'in Rossetti's reading there was an "insistence on the rhythm" and "a prolonged tension of the rhyme-sounds" which was very noticeable.' But rhyme, after all, is not so vital a principle in poetry that we should condemn with severity Rossetti's lapses in this respect, except when he falls to such pantomimic depths as,

All save one I give to thy freewill,—  
 The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Mr. Benson quotes another stanza from the same poem as an example of Rossetti's use of the supernatural—

In painting her I shrined her face  
Mid mystic trees, where light falls in  
Hardly at all ; a covert place  
Where you might think to find a din  
Of doubtful talk, and a live flame  
Wandering, and many a shape whose name  
Not itself knoweth, and old dew,  
And your own footsteps meeting you,  
And all things going as they came.

According to Mr. Benson this passage 'stands in the very first rank of the poetry that brings a sense of dim mystery and remote horror to the mind'; but if this praise is not extravagant, what rank are we to assign to the author of 'The Ancient Mariner' and of those lines, which Rossetti probably had here in remembrance—

A savage place ! as holy and enchanted  
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted  
By woman wailing for her demon-lover !

In wealth of imagery Rossetti may be equal to Coleridge, but he is certainly his inferior in musical quality. 'Not itself knoweth' is an awkward phrase of which Coleridge would not have been guilty, and

'where light falls in Hardly at all' cannot justly be considered the *ne plus ultra* of poetical diction. To exaggerate the demerit of these asperities, however, would be to go to the other extreme, and it is more relevant to point to the pregnant line,

And your own footsteps meeting you,

as the first appearance in his poetry of that idea which was afterwards to find pictorial expression in the design *How They Met Themselves*.

If there is one adjective which may be applied with equal justice to nearly all Rossetti's work, it is *intense*; and this intensity, so characteristic of his art, frequently finds expression in the dramatic force with which he will begin a poem. Typical examples of this 'attack' are the opening lines of 'Sister Helen'—

Why did you melt your waxen man,  
Sister Helen?

and of 'The White Ship'—

By none but me can the tale be told,

Or of the sonnet 'A Superscription'—

Look in my face ; my name is Might-have-been :  
I am also called No-more, Too-late, Farewell.

In the sonnets particularly these openings are strongly personal, for, as Mr. Benson pertinently

points out, 'the tendency of the sonnet-writer as a rule is to reserve such effects for the climax.' This is true in the general, but we should remember that Rossetti had unimpeachable precedents in Milton's—

Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughter'd saints, whose bones  
Lie scatter'd on the Alpine mountains cold ;

and—

Fairfax, whose name in arms through Europe rings,  
Filling each mouth with envy or with praise. . . .

But while the rousing effect of this immediate call to arms is clear gain, a drooping simplicity in the termination, cited as another characteristic of Rossetti, is a more questionable virtue. As a typical example of this double characteristic we may take the sonnet—

'RETRO ME SATHANA !'

Get thee behind me. Even as, heavy-curl'd,  
Stooping against the wind, a charioteer  
Is snatched from out his chariot by the hair,  
So shall Time be ; and as the void car, hurled  
Abroad by reinless steeds, even so the world :  
Yea, even as chariot-dust upon the air,  
It shall be sought and not found anywhere.  
Get thee behind me, Satan. Oft unfurled,  
Thy perilous wings can beat and break like lath  
Much mightiness of men to win thee praise.  
Leave these weak feet to tread in narrow ways.  
Thou still, upon the broad vine-sheltered path,  
Mayst wait the turning of the phials of wrath  
For certain years, for certain months and days.

Here the quiet of the closing line has its due effect, and appropriately suggests the slow drawing out of time. Consequently the measured progression of thought is sustained to the end, though its march is nearly brought to a halt in the middle by the inherent weakness of 'sought and not found anywhere.' But elsewhere this mannerism will, to the ears of many readers, bring an exquisite opening to a lame conclusion, as in that otherwise perfect sonnet, 'The One Hope.'

Ah ! when the wan soul in that golden air  
 Between the scripted petals softly blown  
 Peers breathless for the gift of grace unknown,  
 Ah ! let none other alien spell soe'er  
 But only the one Hope's one name be there,  
 Not less nor more, but even that word alone. •

Here the last line is wholly indefensible. It is void of music and significance, and is a mere meaningless amplification of the preceding line. Nothing is lost by its omission save compliance to the requirements of the skeleton form of a sonnet. It is, as Dryden would say, 'a mere filler to stop a vacancy.' To mistake this empty redundancy for 'simple dignity' is one of the distressing results of swallowing an author whole ; and though, as Hoppner has remarked, 'no great expectations can be formed, of

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that student who is a critic before he becomes a lover,' yet it is doubtful whether that critic who is blind to his master's faults is the surest index to his virtues. A further example of the perversion of a flaw into an ornament is the indiscriminating admiration which sees 'childlike simplicity' in the last line of a quatrain from 'An Old Song Ended' ('How should I your true love know')—

'For a token is there nought,  
Say, that he should bring?'  
'He will bear a ring I gave  
And another ring.'

Why *another* ring? Because the fourth line must be completed with a rhyme to 'bring,' and 'ring' is the word nearest to hand. The repetition here is of a very different order to that made use of by Morris in—

Gold on her head, and gold on her feet,  
And gold where the hems of her kirtle meet,  
And a golden girdle round my sweet ;  
*Ah ! qu'elle est belle La Marguerite.*

Or by Blake in—

Piping down the valleys wild,  
Piping songs of pleasant glee,  
On a cloud I saw a child,  
And he laughing said to me :

‘Pipe a song about a Lamb!’  
 So I piped with merry cheer.  
 ‘Piper, pipe that song again’;  
 So I piped: he wept to hear.

Notwithstanding his deep and profound admiration for Blake—the appreciation of whose work he did so much to forward—Rossetti had in truth little *stylistic* affinity with the author of ‘Songs of Innocence.’ The kinship between them is to be found in the symbolism common to their work, but beyond that neither in the matter nor the manner of their poems and designs. The naïveté and ardent devotion of Blake’s art finds a parallel in the poems of Christina Rossetti, but hardly in the work of Dante Gabriel. The simplicity which was natural, and therefore ingenuous, with the two former, was by the latter deliberately assumed, even in those works which have these characteristics in the highest degree, the early paintings of *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* and *The Annunciation*. This is not to deny to all Rossetti’s work, and particularly to his poetry, the quality of simplicity, or to assert that when present it is necessarily strained or insincere. We may always distinguish between true and spurious simplicity, because in the true each word seems inevitable and unable to be altered or removed. In the lines quoted from ‘An



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Old Song Ended,' there is nothing inevitable in the presence of the second ring, and it is not difficult to think of an alternative ending to the verse. But how unalterable is this fine quatrain from 'Stratton Water'—

'They told me you were dead, Janet,—  
How could I guess the lie?'

'They told me you were false, Lord Sands,—  
What could I do but die?'

Indeed, simplicity is so essential a characteristic of the ballad-form that Rossetti could not have attained eminence in this branch of letters had it been by him unobtainable. But the point to remember is that with Rossetti simplicity is more the result of art than the unaffected outpouring of a childlike nature. It was an acquired habit of the Pre-Raphaelite Brother rather than an inherited tendency in the Anglo-Italian artist. His inborn instincts led him ever away from the severe towards the ornate; and this proclivity finds marked expression in his pictorial work, among which a painting such as *Found*, a drawing such as the *Design for a Ballad*, appear only as exceptions, while the intricate patterning of *The Beloved*, *Mary at the Door of Simon*, *Lady Lilith*, and indeed of the great bulk of his productions, is a recurring index to his complex and sceptical nature. Sceptical, because though

inclined to be dogmatic in matters of art, in religion he was a latitudinarian, not to say an agnostic. When shortly before his death he was seized with an anxiety to make confession—an intention never carried out—he said, ‘I can make nothing of Christianity, but I only want a confessor to give me absolution for my sins.’ Devoutness was foreign to his character, but ritualism was not without its appeal to the artist and symbolist. Even in the very early poem ‘Ave’ we find the same preoccupation with the ceremony and pageantry of Christianity—

Soul, is it Faith, or Love, or Hope,  
That lets me see her standing up  
Where the light of the Throne is bright?  
Unto the left, unto the right,  
The cherubim, succinct, conjoint,  
Float inward to a golden point,  
And from between the seraphim  
The glory issues for a hymn.

The grandeur of these sonorous lines is not to be denied, but they unmistakably indicate how far removed even in these early days were the author’s thoughts from the childlike faith of Blake.

But in truth Rossetti was but little influenced by Blake or any other English poet. For a time he came under the spell of Browning, to whom he pays

almost open homage in ‘A Last Confession,’ and even ‘Dante at Verona’ bears traces of this giant’s influence. His profound reverence for Keats is well known, and perhaps sufficient emphasis has not yet been laid on his appreciation of the shorter poems of Milton. There would appear to be a fused reminiscence of Keat’s ‘perilous seas’ and the Milton of ‘L’Allegro’ in those exquisite lines ‘Love’s Nocturne’—

Poets’ fancies all are there :  
 There the elf-girls flood with wings  
 Valleys full of plaintive air ;  
 There breath perfumes ; there in rings  
 Whirl the foam-bewildered springs ;  
 Siren there  
 Winds her dizzy hair and sings.

It may be doubted if Rossetti ever wrote anything to surpass these lines for sheer beauty. Their delicate ecstasy reveals his imaginative gifts in the highest degree, and the languorous music of the phrasing, notably of the third line, soars to an ethereal melody that Rossetti but rarely attained. His poems are full of arresting lines, such as those from ‘The Sea-Limits’—

Consider the sea’s listless chime :  
 Time’s self it is, made audible.

Or from 'Soul's Beauty'—

Under the arch of Life, where love and death,  
 Terror and mystery, guard her shrine, I saw  
 Beauty enthroned.

But the appeal here, as almost always with Rossetti, is made far more powerfully to the imagination than to the ear. And this very fact destroys the greater portion of the argument whereby Nordau and other critics have sought to prove Rossetti guilty of decadence in making sense subservient to sound. There are passages in Rossetti which may seem obscure to many readers, in which the gossamer of his thought is spun so fine that it defies the sight of eyes less bright than his; but no unbiassed reader of his poetic works can hesitate to acquit him of philandering with words, can for one moment doubt his continual endeavour to use them purely as a vehicle for his thoughts. We are told—nay, from the different versions which exist of some of his poems we *know* that his revising was always directed towards strengthening and clarifying his text, that to him 'absolute lucidity of expression was the first necessity.' Whatever else he may have been he was never a conscious stylist, a builder of literature by vowel harmony and the orchestration of consonants. Had he paid more attention to these matters of craftsmanship, his poetry would have been

more polished and he would never have passed those flaws to some of which attention has already been called. But he was careless in matters which seemed to him small, and even in the noblest of his poems we are liable to be disturbed by the sudden intrusion of a jarring note, a discord that a Tennyson or a Stevenson would have been at much pains to eliminate. True to a great extent of Rossetti is what Stevenson wrote of Scott: 'He conjured up the romantic with delight, but he had hardly patience to describe it.'

It is not in any petty spirit or for a love of cavilling that insistence is here laid on Rossetti's inequalities and asperities, but in order that a distinction may be made between his gifts as an artist and as a craftsman. 'Those who knew him best,' says Mr. Benson, 'always held that the man was infinitely greater than his work, which carelessly and inevitably radiated from him, hurled out from an inner restlessness. The medium in which he worked, whether words or colours, was a hindrance rather than a help to him.' Can any one imagine these words being fitly applied to Tennyson? It is a hopeful doctrine that genius consists in an infinite capacity for taking pains—but it smacks of the Sunday School and does not always fit the facts. An infinite capacity for taking pains is a sign of the great craftsman, of whom Tennyson and Stevenson

may be taken as types in literature, not forgetting the while that a man may be a great artist as well as a great craftsman. But there is another order of genius, impatient of niceties of expression, who does not so much enchant us by the symmetry of his structures as dazzle us with flashes of what we can only call inspiration. It is to this order of genius that Rossetti belongs. As a poet he had neither the swinging artisanship of Morris nor the suave craftsmanship of Tennyson. As a painter he had neither the facile ease of Millais nor the meticulous application of Mr. Holman Hunt. Yet, notwithstanding their superior craftsmanship, there are faces in Rossetti's pictures and there are lines in his poems of a haunting intensity and emotional force scarcely to be found in their more equable achievements.

It is because Rossetti was a greater artist than a craftsman that he is a dangerous model for students, who will always be more apt and find it easier to imitate those mannerisms which are really defects in a master than to emulate those virtues which have won him the praise of the discerning. It is in the nature of inspiration to be fitful, and variations of impulse check and hinder sustained flights. There are times when even in his imagery we feel that Rossetti was not happily inspired. We are entranced with the

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melodious commencement of 'The Song of the Bower'—

Say, is it day, is it dusk in thy bower,  
Thou whom I long for, who longest for me?  
Oh ! be it light, be it night, 'tis Love's hour,  
Love's that is fettered as Love's that is free.

But it is almost impossible not to receive a shock, as from a sudden fall, when we come to the third line of the stanza—

What were my prize, could I enter thy bower,  
This day, to-morrow, at eve or at morn?  
Large lovely arms and a neck like a tower,  
Bosom then heaving that now lies forlorn.

It may be that this is an Italian characteristic, and we certainly find 'large arms, so lithe and round' in Fazio's description of his mistress, translated by Rossetti in 'The Early Italian Poets'; but one would have thought that this admiration for the large was a characteristic more of Flemish than of Italian art, and in any case a consensus of opinion condemns it as bordering on coarseness. There is a not altogether dissimilar drop in Rossetti's most popular poem, 'The Blessed Damozel'—

And still she bowed herself and stooped  
Out of the circling charm ;  
Until her bosom must have made  
The bar she leaned on warm.

oul and flesh  
these  
dumy

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There is nothing intrinsically objectionable in the last two lines, but their occurrence in a poem that is essentially spiritual is not happy. We are not accustomed to endow spirits with animal heat, and this unexpected intrusion of a material attribute suddenly drags us from Heaven down to earth. Perhaps it is neither in the spiritual nor in the earthly plane that Rossetti is seen at his very best, but in the middle kingdom of the intellect; and if this be so we may justly look to his most intellectual poem, 'The Burden of Nineveh,' for his most perfect achievement. Nowhere does Rossetti's soaring imagination more steadily maintain its flight than in this noble piece, nowhere are his thoughts expressed with more seigniorial gravity and grandeur—

For as that Bull-god once did stand  
And watched the burial clouds of sand,  
Till these at last without a hand  
Rose o'er his eyes, another land,  
And blinded him with destiny :—  
So may he stand again ; till now,  
In ships of unknown sail and prow,  
Some tribe of the Australian plough  
Bear him afar,—a relic now  
Of London, not of Nineveh !

↓  
The inequalities which characterise Rossetti's poetry find a parallel in his pictorial work. There can be



MRS. WILLIAM MORRIS



little doubt that both Millais and Holman Hunt regarded him as something of an amateur. He had neither the facility of the first nor the conscientiousness of the second, and he could never bring himself to submit, as they did, to the discipline of the drawing school. It was characteristic of the impetuosity of Rossetti that he always wanted to run before he could walk. First Brown and then Holman Hunt tried to chain him down to facts, but what really interested Rossetti were not observable facts, but his own imaginings. The natural bent of his art is seen more clearly in his illustrations to the poets and his Dantesque pictures than in his 'Annunciation,' individual and personal though that be. As soon as he escaped from the supervision of Mr. Hunt he no longer bothered about trying to make his pictures real. From Mr. Hunt's standpoint he ceased to be a Pre-Raphaelite, for instead of adhering to the simplicity of nature, he wholly abandoned himself to the complexity of his dreams. His artistic attitude has been well summed up by Mr. D. S. MacColl. 'Rossetti, fortified by literature, turned into the fields of painting like a child. As a child makes scenes for his stories with pillows in a bed, with bricks on a carpet, with sand on the shore, snug dens for the fancy, he invented a world of secret picture places; rooms like nests in a tree-top,

through chinks and crannies in whose walls bits of the floor of the world are described far away, staircases that climb to the wind, the balcony of heaven from which one may lean and look down as at a street . . . they are all built and exactly joinered in the Nowhere of their stories. . . . In place of the art that, respectful of the *thing there*, marshalled groups and masses of the insignificant into significance of composition, by light and shadow, here was an art that fetched object by object the thing desired, as a bird the twigs for its nest, and fitted them together in a bright savage pattern.’<sup>1</sup> It is this patterning which is one of the great technical fortes of Rossetti’s art and gives so great a decorative charm to his paintings and designs, though it is the inventiveness displayed in the arrangement of objects rather than the diversity of the objects themselves which gives so great a variety to his paintings. Rossetti’s appreciation of beauty<sup>religion</sup> was limited, but what it lacked in catholicity it made up in intensity. He loved certain types of faces, certain rich stuffs, certain pieces of furniture and ornaments, and these he painted over and over again in different combinations. A certain spiral shell of pearls, worn at the side of the hair, recurs in so many of his idealised portraits that it almost amounts to a signature. And just as he was

<sup>1</sup> D. S. MacColl, ‘Nineteenth Century Art.’

limited in his love of types and decorative objects, so was he fundamentally limited in his love of place and period. Rare excursions are made into classical times, as *Cassandra*, into the eighteenth century, as *Doctor Johnson at the Mitre*; but the land of Nowhere to which Mr. MacColl alludes is Rossetti's idea of the Italy of the fourteenth century.

Inasmuch then as Rossetti's pictures are the result more of *mental* than of *visual* effort, are subjective as opposed to objective, they cannot helpfully be judged by realistic standards. The absence of light and shade, the lack of atmosphere, the cupid's-bow convention for a mouth, must all be accepted as part and parcel of his art. Mr. Watts-Dunton has observed that to Rossetti 'every feature had its suggestive value. To him the mouth really represented the sensuous part of the face no less certainly than the eyes represented the spiritual part; and if in certain heads the sensuous fulness of the lips became scarcely Caucasian, this was a necessary correction to eyes which became on their part over-mystical in their spirituality.' Since the human *ego* may be said to reside rather in the spirit of man than in his fleshly tenement, we may find in this statement an explanation of Rossetti's conventionalising of mouths and concentration on the eyes as the representatives of individuality. Certainly there is a vast

difference between his painting of these two features, and whereas nothing can be learnt from his painting of mouths, in his renderings of the varied expressiveness of the eye Rossetti is an acknowledged master.

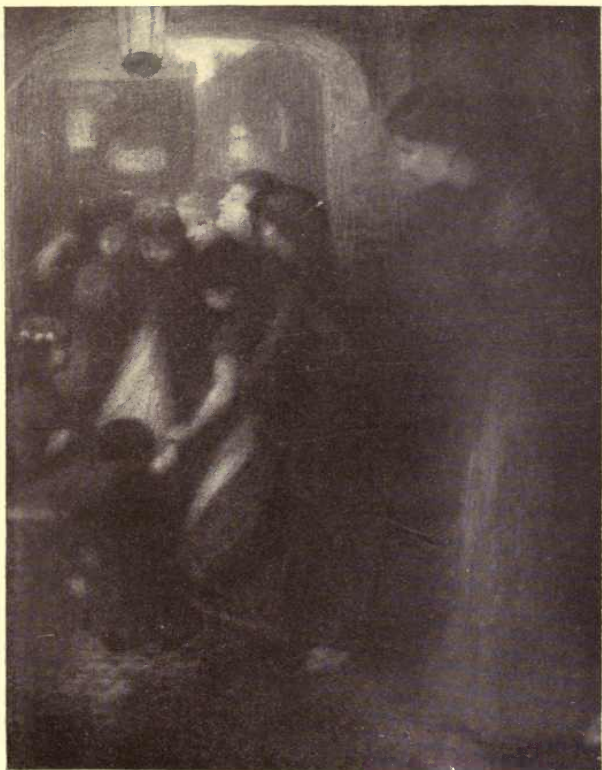
After his skill in patterning, in nicely poising the balance of a design, Rossetti's greatest technical gift was as a colourist, and the intensity of his hues well match the ardour of his disposition. In no other department did he make so great an advance in the course of his career, as may be seen by comparing at the Tate Gallery the ascetic colour of *The Annunciation* with the sumptuous splendour of hue in *Beata Beatrix* and *Mrs. William Morris*. In his endeavour to get an equal intensity of colour in his water-colours, Rossetti would at times rub a cake of pigment on the paper, and his violent treatment of this delicate medium may be held responsible for a certain woolliness of texture which characterises some of his aquarelles. But in his best water-colours, such as the *Paolo and Francesca* triptych, shown at the Franco-British Exhibition, he attains a deep brilliancy of jewel-like hues which has rarely been equalled and never surpassed by other workers in this medium.

This increasing command over colour, coupled with the fact that so many of his most famous paintings belong to the later period of his life, is sufficient proof

that there was no falling off in Rossetti's executive skill, though, as Mr. Watts-Dunton points out, 'he was always making experiments in flesh-painting. As the sense of mystery grew upon him, the corporeal part of man seemed more and more to be but the symbol of the spiritual; and more and more did he try to render it so. Down to the very last all his faculties remained unimpaired, and he could have painted flesh as brilliantly as he painted it in *The Beloved* and *Monna Vanna*; but, by a method of his own (laying in his heads in "genuine ultramarine" and white), he hoped to give, and did give in his after painting, that mysterious and dreamy suggestiveness to the flesh which his mysterious conceptions required. But over and over again did a friend, who during the last nine or ten years of his life used to see his works in every stage, warn him that he was trying to make a corporeal medium do what it never can do, what can only be done indeed by the symbolical medium of language—i.e. represent to the ordinary imagination the visions of a mystical poet. The *Astarte Syriaca* is a case in point. . . . After he had painted the head, the friend perceived and told him that, striking as was the shadowy sombreness and admirably as it rendered the mystical idea, "the British buyer would not stand it." And after a little reflection Rossetti thought so too.

He took another canvas and began afresh. But the mystery of the subject again overpowered him, and he made it as dark and sombre as ever. It is easy to see why this picture has been somewhat roughly handled by the critics; but to those who know and feel what Rossetti tried to express by it, and did express with amazing subtlety and power—the mystic type of all Eastern, and yet the mother of all Western beauty—it will be one of his most interesting and characteristic pictures. But it is just here where such an artistic medium as painting, which has to act physically upon the senses, falls so far short of such a medium as poetry, which never actualises but acts directly upon the imagination and the intellect.'

Idle indeed would it be to judge a painter with these ambitions by the standards of Hals and Velasquez, a man who confessed that 'proportions always bother me,' by the attainments of a Raphael or a Pheidias. It can hardly be denied that the Dutchman and the Spaniard chose the painter's better part in confining their attention to the visible, to that which fell within the proper province of their art. Yet as we admire the leader of a forlorn hope, applauding his sentiments while despairing of the success of his undertaking, so must our sympathy go forth to the painter who seeks to pierce the veil, who aspires to throw open the



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magic casements and limn the ineffable glamour of what lies without. But what Mr. Watts-Dunton does not perceive, what Rossetti failed to recognise, is that even in painting it is not necessary to insist on actuality. Outlines may be blurred, form half revealed, and thereby a sense of mystery conveyed to the imagination which sharper definition would infallibly destroy. Let science state, it is for art to suggest, and in painting this broken vision is the most potent suggestion. In one drawing, *The Gate of Memory*, second to none in its suggestion of mystery, Rossetti seems to stumble almost by accident on the secret, and for once, an exception in all his art, his mystical thought finds its fitting expression in impressionist technique. It is not too fanciful to regard this drawing as heralding the dawn of the romantic art of the future, for already we have seen its logical development in the later work of Mr. Mathew Maris. Not to those who ape the husks of his achievements, who copy his 'types' and imitate his mannerisms, but to those who by newer and more appropriate technical methods keep alive its sacred fire must we look for a continuance of that mystical romanticism which was the essence of Rossetti's art.

*Permanent Reproductions of Mr. Hollyer's  
photographs of pictures by Rossetti, can  
be obtained at his Studio, 9, Pembroke  
Square, Kensington, W.  
Illustrated Catalogue One Shilling.*

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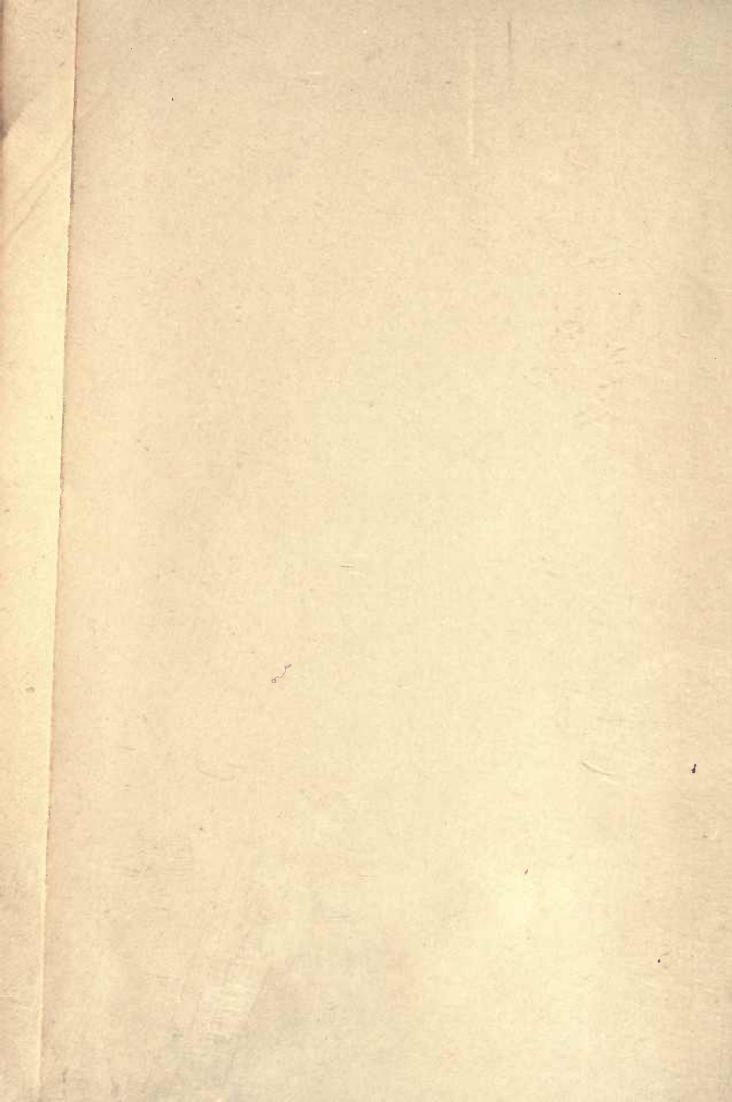
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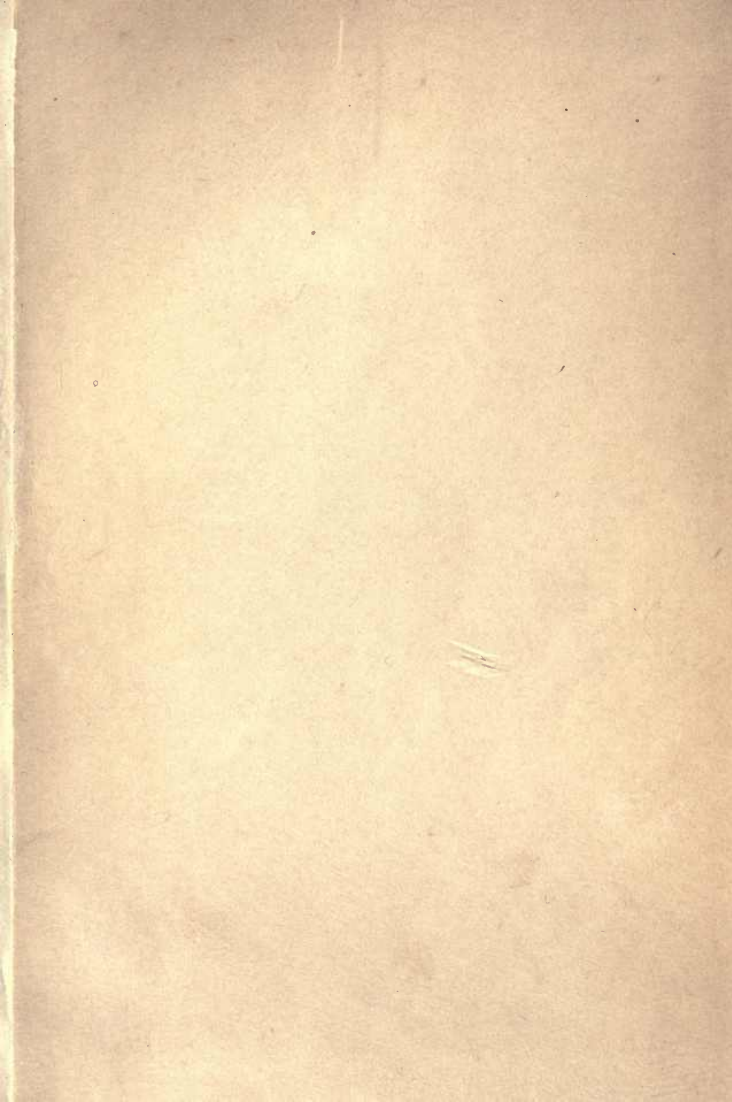
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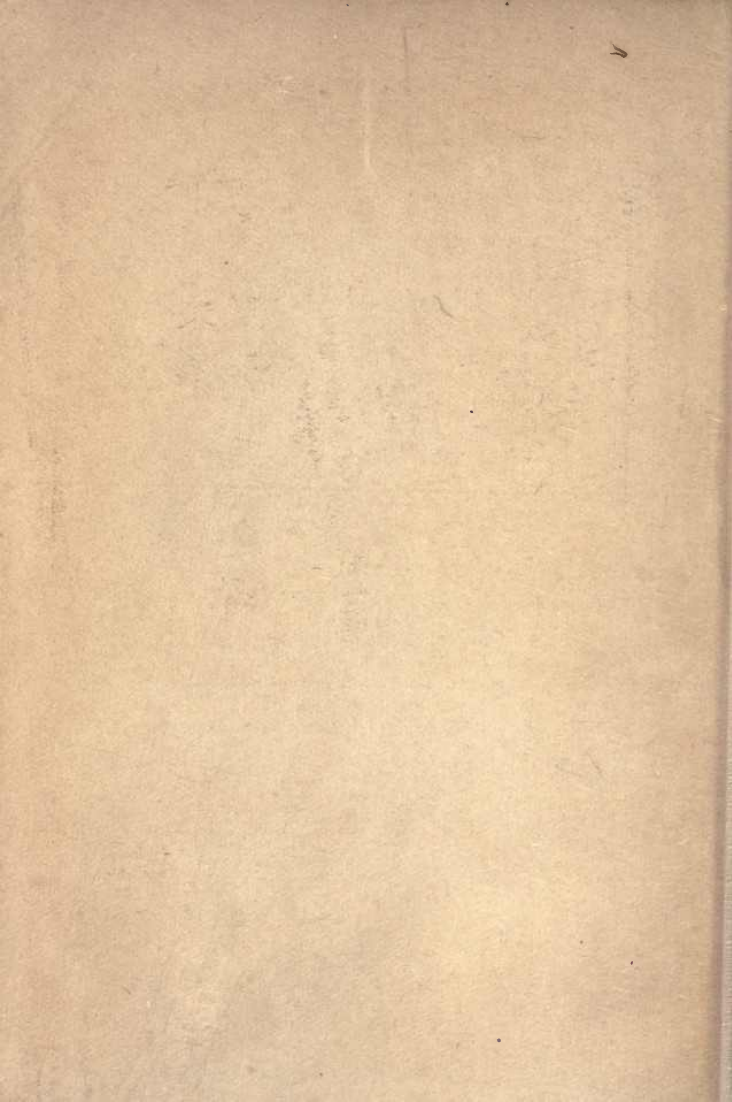
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